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THE STORIES BEHIND THE
WORLD'S LONGEST BEARDS

RUNEY TUNES MIGUEL SERRANO AND THE OCCULT FAR RIGHT

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HUN-IDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS MYSTERY AIR RAIDS OF WWII

SOMERSET GIMP MAN • WOMB RAIDERS • MEGALITHOMANIA • STEAK AND KIDNEY PUTIN

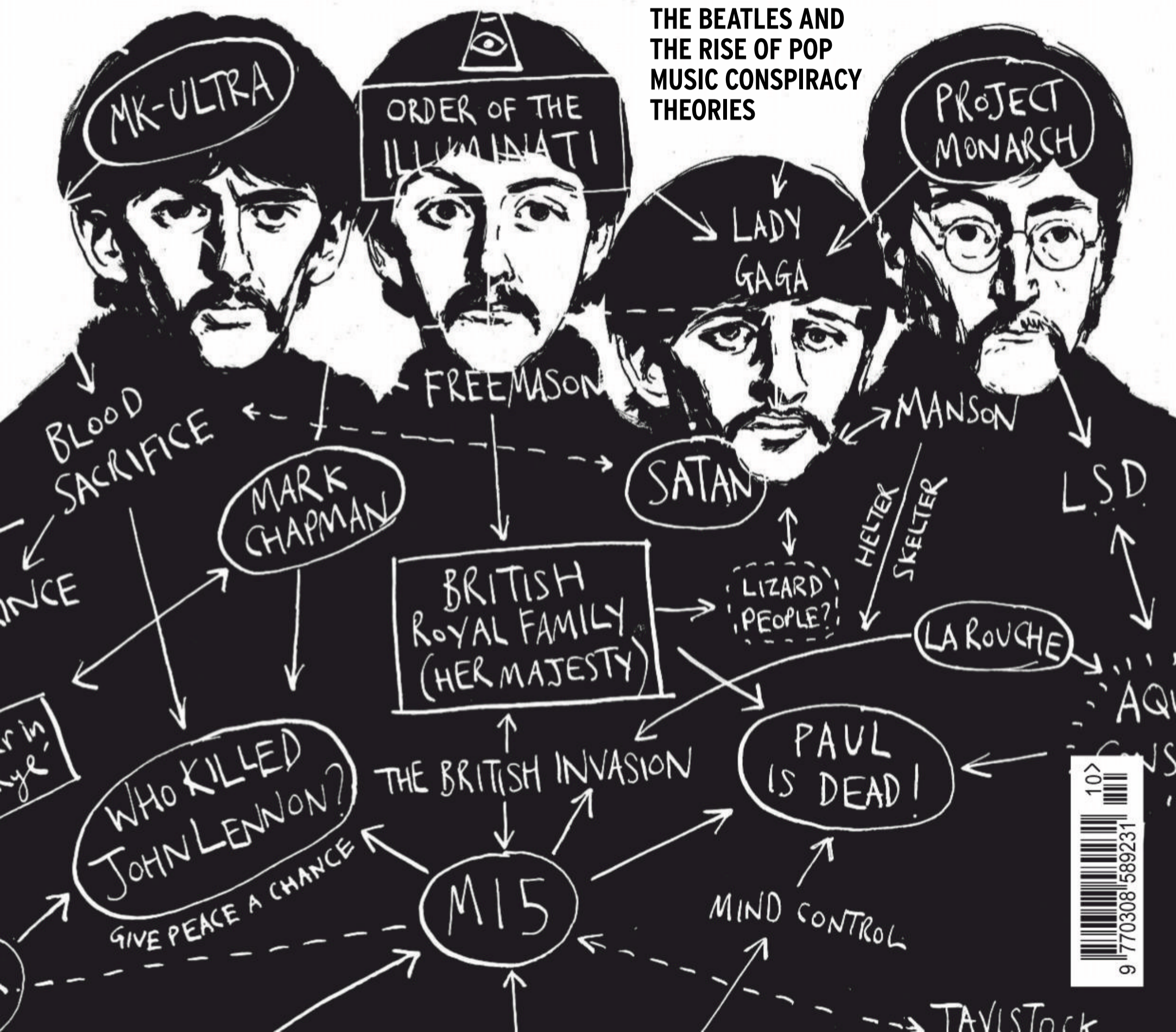
THE
WORLD'S
WEIRDEST
NEWS

ForteanTimes

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PAUL IS DEAD

THE BEATLES AND
THE RISE OF POP
MUSIC CONSPIRACY
THEORIES



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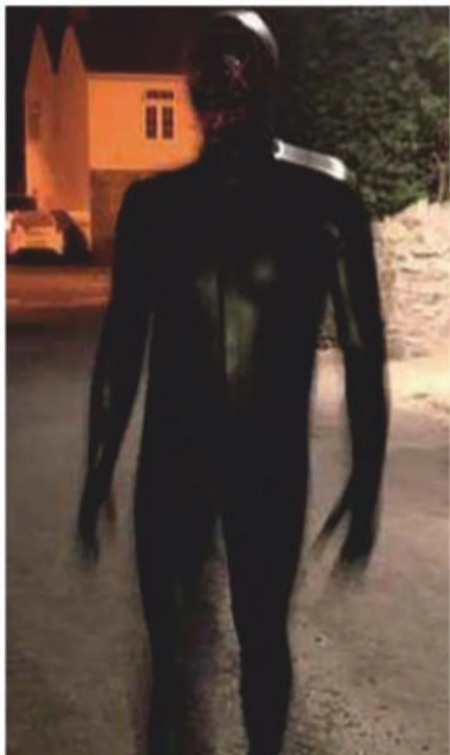


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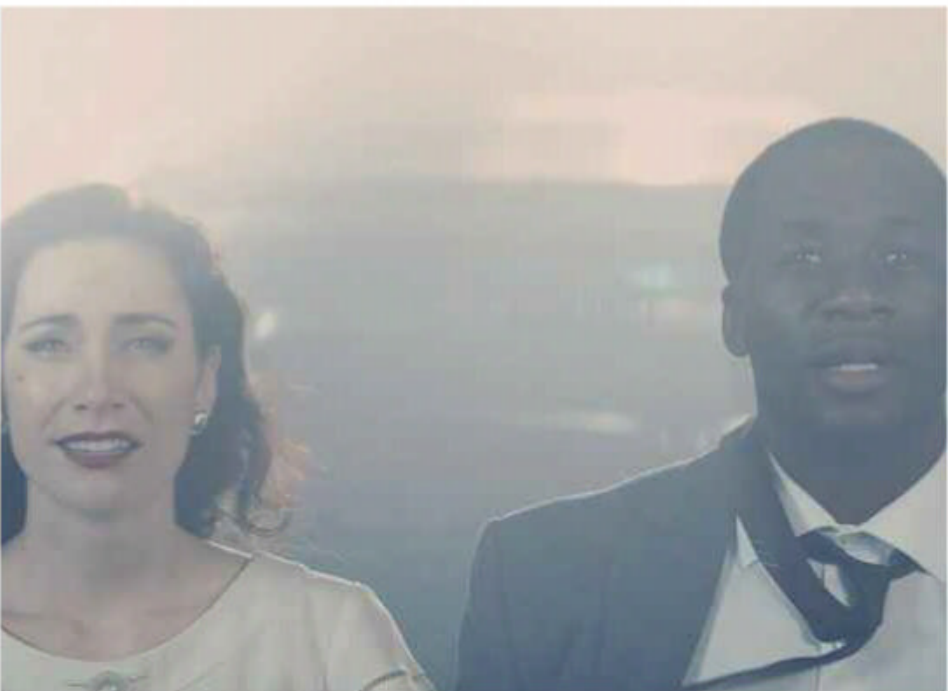
30 Beatlemania and pop conspiracy theories



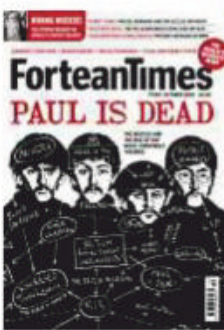
24 The Somerset Gimp Man



38 Wonderful whiskers



44 The Betty and Barney Hill abduction on film



FORTEAN TIMES 384
Why fortean ?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE
78

STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: seagull siege, polio panics, womb raiders, Epstein conspiracy theories and more...

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 12 FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS | 17 CLASSICAL CORNER |
| 15 SCIENCE | 18 GHOSTWATCH |
| 16 ARCHÆOLOGY | 28 THE UFO FILES |

FEATURES

30 COVER STORY THE BEATLES AND POP MUSIC CONSPIRACY

With the release of *Abbey Road* in 1969, rumours that Paul McCartney had died and been replaced with a double started to spread around the world. **DEAN BALLINGER** follows the long and winding road of pop conspiracy theory back to its source.

38 THE WORLD'S LONGEST BEARDS

JAN BONDESON presents some notes from the annals of pogonotrophical extremism.

44 THE HILL ABDUCTION ON SCREEN

A new film based on the 1961 abduction of Betty and Barney Hill, asks what it means to be an alien in America. **NIGEL WATSON** explores the relationship between the Hill case and the representation of alien encounters in cinema and television.

REPORTS

26 MEGALITHOMANIA 2019

Stoners' Glastonbury gathering **ROB IRVING**

48 STRANGE STATESMEN

UFOs: Undifferentiated Fascist Objects **SD TUCKER**

58 BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

Beyond the Light Barrier **THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE**

FORUM

55 Keeping a lid on the V-2 **ANDREW MAY**

56 Hun-identified flying objects **TARAS YOUNG**

REGULARS

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 02 EDITORIAL | 73 LETTERS | 79 PHENOMENOMIX |
| 61 REVIEWS | 78 READER INFO | 80 STRANGE DEATHS |

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

BEATLES AND BEARDIES

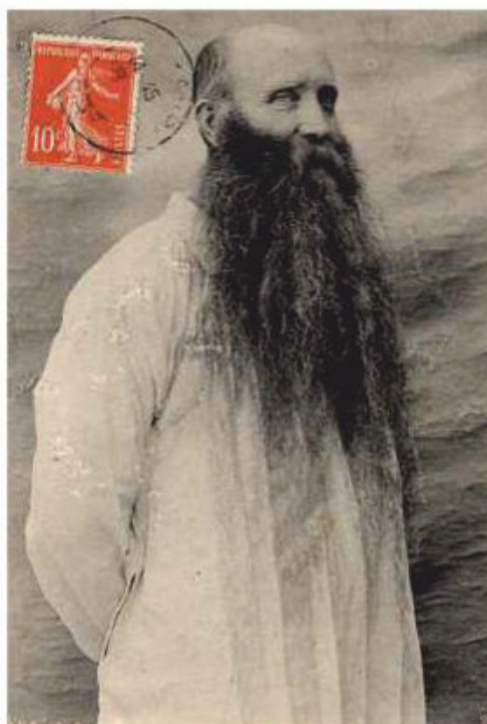
CONSPIRACY THEORY GOES POP

Following last issue's exploration of the pop cultural 'occult explosion' of the late 1960s and its ultimate, tragic expression in the murders perpetrated by Charles Manson and his 'Family', we're once again looking back at 1969.

As well as Woodstock and the Tate/LaBianca killings, the year saw the release of the last recorded Beatles album, *Abbey Road*, with its iconic cover (recreated by countless tourists ever since) of the Fab Four on a zebra crossing near the eponymous EMI recording studios where the LP was made. At the time, though, Beatles fans were scanning said cover for clues which supposedly confirmed the truth of a strange urban legend that had been circulating ever since it appeared in a student magazine back in 1966; the idea was that Paul McCartney had died in a car

accident that year and had subsequently been replaced by a mysterious double. As Dean Ballinger argues in his article (p30), the global spread of the 'Paul is Dead' story marked the start of something new: the pop music conspiracy theory, which has proved to have considerable longevity. Ever since, stars from Elvis to Lady Gaga, Buddy Holly to Prince, have been the subject of conspiracy theories involving faked deaths (like Jeffrey Epstein's? – see p4), Illuminati mind control, Satanic sacrifices, MK-Ultra and Project Monarch, Communist plots to destabilise the West, and CIA plots to take down the emergent counterculture.

Of course, by the time of *Abbey Road*, the formerly loveable mop-tops were paid-up members of this new countercultural movement, staging peace protests, experimenting with drugs, visiting the Maharishi in India, and sporting facial hair impressive enough to rival some of the whiskered wonders presented by Jan Bondeson in his feature on pognotrophical extremism (p38); and by way of a beardie bonus, we present a postcard of the great Luc Prost (above) from Jan's collection that we didn't have room for elsewhere.



FLOODED

Apologies to readers who were looking forward to Mat Coward and Hunt Emerson's Mythconceptions. Unfortunately, Mat found himself flooded out of his office after "an unprecedented local storm", and the subsequent clean-up operation meant he had no time to work on the column, which will return next month.

ERRATA

FT379:39: The photo from Peter Watkins's *The War Game* was incorrectly attributed; the credit should have read: Pathé Contemporary Films / Getty Images.

FT380:4: The headline and caption of our report on the Somerset branch of the Universal Medicine cult referred twice to its founder as "Serge Benyahon"; his name, correct in the report itself, is Serge Benhayon.

FT381:18-20: The ever-vigilant Martin Jenkins of London spotted a couple of howlers in Alan Murdie's Ghostwatch column: "On page 18 (paragraph 2) he attributes a story told by Ralph of Coggeshall (died c. 1227) to 'the reign of Richard II' (deposed 1399). This should have been Richard I (reigned 1189-1199). Then, on page 19 (right-hand column, line 4), he follows a reference to Brazil with the phrase 'In other Spanish-speaking Latin American countries.' Most Latin American countries do speak Spanish; Brazil, however, speaks Portuguese."

FT382:60: Tom Ruffles emailed to point out an amusingly apt error in Chris Hill's review of *Experiencing the Impossible*, where Chris referred to "the Knox sisters". He clearly meant the Fox sisters, but was probably distracted by all that banging and rapping...

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

NO NEED TO SEARCH THE SKIES

THE PERFECT
ForteanTimes
GIFT IS CLOSER
TO HOME



T-SHIRT



MUG



TEA TOWEL

DISCOVER FT'S NEW RANGE OF GIFTS AT
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

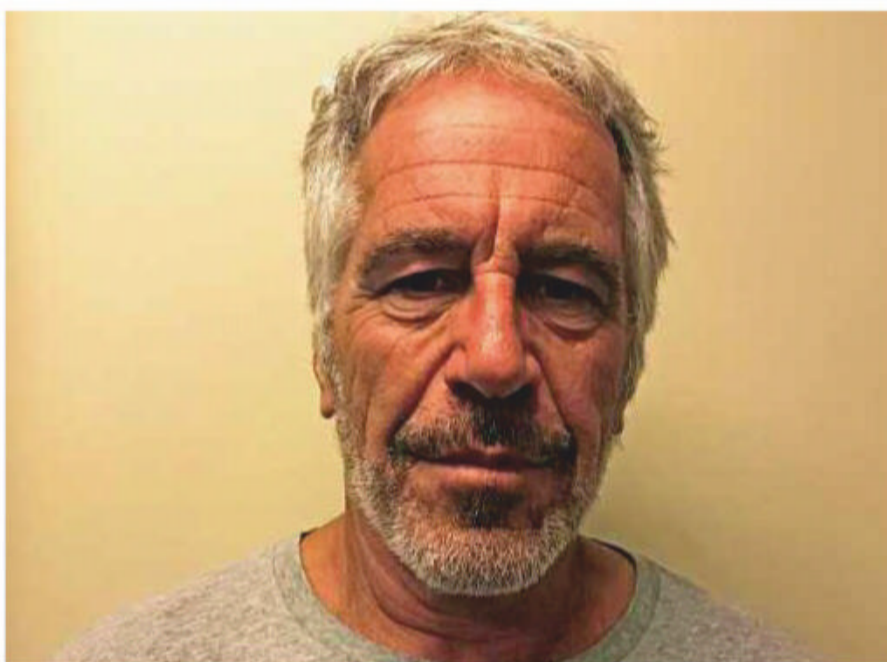
THE C NSPIRASPHERE

The mysterious circumstances surrounding the death (if he is dead) of billionaire sex offender Jeffrey Epstein have led to a torrent of conspiracy theories from all directions. **NOEL ROONEY** looks at what we know so far.

THE EPSTEIN AFFAIR

The untimely death of Jeffrey Epstein, billionaire playboy and convicted paedophile, in a maximum security jail in New York City, has opened up an almighty can of conspiratorial worms. Epstein was on remand before a trial that threatened to expose not only his own multiple crimes against vulnerable young women, but a veritable gallery of the rich and famous who, it is alleged, joined the disgraced tycoon in his crimes – crimes described by one of the lead detectives on the case as a ‘sexual pyramid scheme’ involving hundreds of young women. The mysterious circumstances surrounding his death, and the identities of the celebrities and politicians who may have raped and assaulted a large number of underage women, have unleashed a torrent of speculation, and not just from the usual suspects.

The published facts, such as they are, suggest that Epstein, after failing in a suicide bid three weeks earlier, and a few days after being taken off ‘suicide watch’, contrived to hang himself in his cell; this, despite the fact he was supposed to be checked every half an hour by prison staff (who turned out to be asleep). An autopsy found that his injuries were, in part, consistent with death by hanging, although his hyoid bone was broken, an injury more consistent with murder by strangulation. In a curious twist, the autopsy was supervised by Dr Michael Baden (now a venerable 85 years old),



ABOVE: Jeffrey Epstein reportedly committed suicide in a maximum security jail.

a celebrity forensic pathologist who, some conspiracy theorists allege, helped to cover up evidence around the assassination of JFK.

Behind the sparse official account lies a veritable smorgasbord of anomalies, questions and rumours. Epstein claimed that his previous suicide attempt was in fact attempted murder; his cellmate, an ex-policeman suspected of four murders, had tried to strangle him. That man was subsequently transferred out, and the cellmate who replaced him was transferred out the day before Epstein’s death. His cell was supposed to be equipped with sheets that were designed to tear if someone tried to hang themselves; but, apparently, Epstein managed to have the sheets replaced shortly before his death.

Even so, given the layout of his cell, it should have been quite difficult for Epstein, a stocky individual, to manoeuvre himself into a position where he could drop himself with sufficient force to produce the injuries noted in the autopsy. And a lawyer for some of his alleged victims, Spencer Kuvin, reported that he was informed by a prison officer that the cell had comprehensive 24-hour CCTV. If there is no footage of Epstein’s last hours, then the cameras must have been deliberately switched off, he claims.

And all this is assuming, of course, that Jeffrey Epstein is actually dead. A number of commentators have suggested that he was secretly smuggled out of prison, and is now living elsewhere under a new identity. In which case, he may still be able to carry out his grand plan

(modesty was clearly not part of his character) to inseminate a large number of young women so that his genes would form the basis of a new super race. The rumour that he had been lifted from prison was fortified by a post on 4-Chan, allegedly by a prison worker, claiming that he had seen Epstein, cuffed and in a wheelchair, being taken from the prison, just 10 minutes before news of his suicide broke in the media. This particular rumour is closely linked to a story, the source of which is a former soldier for Mafia godfather John Gotti, that Epstein was visited, a few days before he ‘died’, by William Barr, the US Attorney General: why?

There are also claims that Epstein was an intelligence asset, employed by US security agencies, who funded his lavish lifestyle so that he could gather dirt on prominent figures; a kind of national security blackmail archive to ensure compliance with Deep State imperatives. One business acquaintance was quoted in several sources as saying that he had never seen Epstein doing any work; he was too busy arranging his exotic – and criminal – leisure activities. If so, was Ghislaine Maxwell (daughter of newspaper tycoon Robert Maxwell, whose own death had more than a hint of conspiracy about it), Epstein’s former girlfriend and, according to many, chief procuress of young women for his tawdry entertainments, also an intelligence asset?

The default alternative theory – that he was bumped off at the behest of interested parties – has appeared all over the place: the Conspirasphere, of course, but also the mainstream media, myriad otherwise sober websites, social media, and my inbox. This is one of



GULLS GO BAD... AGAIN

Besieging pensioners and abducting dogs

PAGE 6



UNTIMELY RIPP'D

Womb raiders and foetal abductions

PAGE 22



ROCKING AREA 51

Mass protest turns into dance music festival?

PAGE 28



ABOVE: The 'Temple' building on Epstein's private Caribbean island.

those stories that enables conspiratorial thinking across a broad political and cultural spectrum, drawing in even people who see such thinking as the preserve of nut jobs in tin foil hats. And when one asks the classic conspiracy question – *cui bono?* – the list of potential beneficiaries is both staggeringly long and politically eclectic, meaning that fingers can be pointed in all directions *from* all directions; this is a truly democratised episode of conspiracism, perhaps the first of its kind and, perhaps more worryingly, a potential bellwether for how future news furores may play out.

And so to the suspect list. Given the allegations and rumours swirling around Prince Andrew, there is the British royal family (who could of course be said to have form in this respect) via MI6 or Special Forces. The Clintons feature prominently on many lists: Bill and Hillary, famously, are linked to so many suspicious deaths that a special term – Arkancide – has been coined by those who promote the

Clinton Body Count theory. And there is the mystery of why Epstein had, in the mansion on his private Caribbean island, a painting of Bill Clinton, reclining in an armchair in a blue dress (think Monica Lewinsky – that dress – or Hillary at the Democratic Primary) and a pair of high-heeled shoes. Then there is Donald Trump who, despite gleefully joining in the anti-Clinton speculation on Twitter, is not above suspicion, and certainly knew Epstein pretty well. High-flying lawyer Alan Dershowitz, US politicians George Mitchell and Bill Richardson, billionaire businessmen Glenn Dubin and Les Wexner, actors Bill Murray and Kevin Spacey, and even American icon Oprah Winfrey, might also, it is claimed, have something to gain from silencing Epstein.

Epstein's private jet, dubbed the Lolita Express, is a central feature in many of the rumours and allegations. The passenger manifest is a who's who of the rich, powerful, famous and suspect. One name

that struck me was the late Matt Groening, creator of cult cartoon the Simpsons. Groening was, on Epstein's orders, supposedly given a foot massage en route by a young woman, Virginia Giuffre, who is a key witness in the prosecution case. Ms Giuffre did not claim that anything of a sexual nature occurred between her and Groening; but she did tell prosecutors that she was appalled by the 'crusty' state of Groening's toenails.

Despite Epstein's death, prosecutors say they will continue to investigate the case, and will expose the wrongdoings of those associated with the late (or absconded) tycoon's horrible pastimes. Whether that material actually comes to light may, ultimately, be the key factor in solving the mystery that has, arguably, unleashed the broadest public outpouring of conspiracy theories since the assassination of JFK.

<https://sputniknews.com/us/201908231076614118-lawyer-jeffrey-epsteins-victims-claims-info-billionaire-murdered/>

www.conspiracy.news/2019-08-12-murder-of-jeffrey-epstein-by-deep-state.html

<https://donaldjeffries.wordpress.com/2019/08/14/of-epsteins-and-hoaxes/>

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www.intellihub.com/prison-workers-4chan-post-10-minutes-before-news-of-jeffrey-epsteins-death-hit-media-guy-in-a-green-dress-military-outfit-switched-him-out/

www.conspiracy.news/2019-08-23-dead-bodies-false-flags-bill-hillary-clinton-globalists-corruption.html

<https://gilad.online/writings/2019/7/11/epstein-007>

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

SOCKS OFFER INSIGHT INTO MENTAL HEALTH

Sun, 11 April 2018.

Radiographer 'mistook knee for elbow'

Irish Times, 25 Sept 2018.

MUM EMITTED GAS SO POISONOUS IT'S BANNED BY THE GENEVA CONVENTION

Metro, 1 Jan 2019.

Rabid bat hiding in iPad leaps out and bites elderly man

Independent, 30 May 2019.

BEAUTIFUL WOMEN CURED ME OF BEING GAY, SAYS DUTERTE

D.Telegraph, 5 June 2019.

Dad says death left him with 'big, broken heart'

Toronto Star, 31 May 2019.

SIDELINES...

SPOON CRISIS

A woman who swallowed a 5in (13cm) spoon while trying to clear a fish bone in her throat had an operation to remove it from her small intestine in China. *Sunday People*, 21 April 2019.

SUN SONGS

The Sun's 'voice' has been captured. Its vibrations produce bass notes thousands of times deeper than a human ear can hear, but speeding them up to higher frequencies that maintain their natural harmonies has revealed otherworldly tunes. *D.Mirror*, 17 June 2019.

LAST ORDERS, PLEASE

The French doctrine of imminent apocalypse goes under the unlikely Franglais name *la collapsologie*, coined by agronomist Pablo Servigne in his 2015 bestseller, *Comment tout peut s'effondrer*. It's based on the assumption that climate change, declining resources, species extinction and rubbish mountains will drive humanity to the brink by as early as 2030. *Times*, 14 Feb 2019.

ZIGGY'S SCREWED UP EYES

George Underwood and David Bowie were at school together. In 1962, the 15-year-olds fell out over a girl. Underwood hit Bowie, who was left with a blue right eye, while his left appeared dark after a deep corneal abrasion and paralysis of his iris sphincter muscle. Mr Underwood said that Bowie's different-coloured eyes gave him an "uneearthly aura" which delighted him, and that the pair remained friends. *D.Telegraph*, 15 June 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

SEAGULLS GO BAD | Summer brought the usual crop of stories about malevolent gulls



MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Reports of gulls – usually nesting herring gulls – causing mayhem have become a staple of summer news reports.

BELOW: Gizmo, Becca Louise Hill's pet chihuahua, was reportedly carried off by a gull and has not been seen since 21 July.

- On 21 July, a seagull seized and flew off with a family's pet Chihuahua. Becca Louise Hill, 24, said the gull swooped down and grabbed Gizmo in Paignton, Devon. Gizmo, four, was described as a small, brown dog, weighing 4.4lb (2kg). Ms Hill, 24, said her partner Ashley was with Gizmo at the side of the house at 1pm, as he put the washing out to dry. She said: "A seagull swooped down and grabbed [Gizmo] by the scruff of his neck. Ashley tried to grab his legs, but he was not tall enough and the seagull flew away." Tony Whitehead, spokesman for the RSPB, said that the bird, "undoubtedly a herring gull", was either defending its young or may just have been hungry (well, blow me down, Tony!). There have been no sightings of Gizmo since, although a mammal leg bone, with fur matching Gizmo's, was found on a fire escape in Totnes six days after the dog's abduction, and was being examined by a vet.

There are several recorded incidents of gulls attacking small dogs. In May 2015, Niki Wayne witnessed her Chihuahua puppy



being killed by a flock of gulls in Honiton, Devon [FT331:18]. According to one study, the urban population of seagulls is rising by 13 per cent every year. *BBC News*, *hulldailymail.co.uk*, *Devonlive.com*, 22 July; *D.Telegraph*, Sun, 23+28 July 2019.

- On 23 July, two days after Gizmo's abduction, a gull pecked its way into a flat less than

four miles along the coast, in Torquay, after chewing through protective netting. Matt Cotton, 21, found it sitting on a bed; he tried to grab it, but it started flying round the room. "He was squawking and making so much noise," he said. "It went on for about five minutes and he was trying to peck and claw at my arms until I got him out and closed the window." The gull had crapped all over the bed and was still lurking outside on the sill when hair salon owner Chris got home from work. In the night, it kept waking up Chris and his girlfriend by pecking at the window. It was still there when they woke the next day. *Sun*, 25 July 2019.

- Around 1 August, gulls attacked two-year-old Jesse Vincent in St Columb Minor, Cornwall, shortly after the family dog was put down after being attacked by gulls. The child suffered a bruised face when the birds swooped on her as she played in the garden. "Thank God I was there and managed to hit one [bird], but it still hit her on the side of her face," said



her mother Emily, 40. Two days earlier, the family's Yorkshire terrier Roo was reportedly put down with brain damage after an attack seen by Jessie's brother Jace, three, who got covered with the pet's blood. Puzzlingly, Roo's death had been reported back in July 2015 [FT331:18]: is this a case of recycled news?

Another factor in these late July/early August attacks might be the peak of flying ant swarming. Gulls gobble them up as a tasty snack, and formic acid in the ants can cause intoxication and bizarre behaviour [FT358:27]. *D.Star*, 27 July; *D.Mirror*, 3 Aug 2019.

- Nesting seagulls kept a couple hostage in their own home for six days by attacking them every time they tried to go out in Knott End near Morecambe Bay, Lancashire. Roy and Brenda Pickard, 71, were constantly confronted by two squawking adult seagulls after two chicks ended up on the canopy above the front door. Mr Pickard, 77, was once so viciously attacked that he ended up with a bloody head wound that needed hospital treatment. "The whole thing has

been terrible," said Mr Pickard. "I've not been able to go out of the front door... It's genuinely frightening. My wife isn't well or very mobile at the moment so we're relying on me to get out. Thankfully, we have an integrated garage and I can get into it from the kitchen, open the garage door and drive out to get our shopping, but I have to leave the garage door open, which isn't ideal." A spokesman for Wyre Council said: "The gulls in question are herring gulls and they are protected once nesting and so there are limited solutions available. We advise residents who have a problem with seagulls to bird proof their properties prior to the breeding season." BBC Radio Lancashire arranged for a gazebo to be set up outside the Pickards' garage to offer some limited protection. *telegraph.co.uk*, 21 June; *D.Mail*, 22 June 2019

- In June, a herring gull attacked and destroyed a £30,000 drone being used at the Sellafield nuclear plant in Cumbria. The flying camera was monitoring traffic during a picket by Unite members over claims of low pay. *D.Mirror*, 26 June 2019.

- Paris was beset by an invasion of gulls in the first week of August, leading to locals complaining that the birds were becoming a public nuisance. Favourite perches for the avian invaders are the fire-damaged Notre Dame cathedral on the Ile de la Cité, as well as the old Jewish quarter of Le Marais. Sabine Hourdin, 49, a dance teacher in the 11th arrondissement – one of the worst affected – said their Hitchcock-style dawn shrieking scared the wits out of her the first time she heard it this summer. "It was a horrible noise, like someone being tortured or kittens being strangled – something between laughter and crying," she said. *D.Telegraph*, 9 Aug 2019.

- Experiments by ecologists at the University of Exeter have found that the best way to stop gulls stealing your chips or ice cream is to stare at them. The birds are evidently quite easy to intimidate, and will back off from a meal if they think someone is watching. *D.Telegraph*, 7 Aug 2019. For other gulls behaving badly, see FT331:18-19, 332:26; and for a letter on the subject, FT334:72.

SIDELINES...

CUT OFF HIS LEG

A farmer had to cut off his mangled leg on 19 April after it became trapped in a grain hopper in Pender, northeastern Nebraska. Kurt Kaser, 63, was unloading corn when he stepped on the opening of the hopper and his left foot was sucked inside. He was alone and didn't have his cellphone, so he sawed off his leg below the knee with his 3in (7.6cm) pocket knife and crawled 150ft (45m) to a phone and was flown to a hospital. He never lost consciousness. [AP] *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 16 May 2019.

LUNAR ODOUR

The Moon has a distinct smell. It first hit the Apollo 11 crew on taking off their helmets after landing there on 20 July 1969. Neil Armstrong said it smelled "like the scent of wet ashes". To Buzz Aldrin it was like "the smell in the air after a firecracker has gone off". A total of 842lb (382kg) of Moon rocks and dust has been taken back to Earth, but the smell has been lost. *Sunday Express*, 9 June 2019.

LIVING MISSILE

Arnold Teeter, 49, was arrested after he pulled an iguana from under his shirt, swung it around his head by its tail and threw it at a restaurant manager in Painesville, Ohio. The iguana, named Copper, suffered a leg fracture and was eventually reunited with Jordan Piert, its rightful owner. *news5cleveland.com*, 16 April; *NY Post*, 5 May; *Adelaide Sunday Mail*, 14 July 2019.

MONSTER PLANT

On 9 April, police in Queensland destroyed a 12ft (3.6m) cannabis plant, one of 50 cannabis "trees" growing at the property in Mount Tamborine, Gold Coast. It was one of the biggest dope plants the Rapid Action Patrol Group had ever seen. (*Queensland*) *Courier-Mail*, 11 April 2019.

CHICKEN ASSAULT

Builder Tim Vessey, 45, almost fell off scaffolding when a magpie dropped a 2lb (0.9kg) frozen chicken on his head. The magpie had taken the chicken from an open kitchen window where it had been left to defrost. "It's a good job I had my work hat on or it could have knocked me out," said the former soldier from Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. *Sun*, 24 June 2019.



ABOVE: Gulls attacking drones is a recent development; this photograph shows a gull taking on a Sky TV drone covering an international Test cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2015.



SIDELINES...

POETIC GESTURE

London Review Bookshop in Bloomsbury, London, was a hive of activity on 16 March after a man left a big jar of bees on top of a table in the poetry section. The incident caused a buzz on social media. *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 Mar 2019.

MARINE LIGHTS

A pair of mysterious lights was recently seen underwater near the seaside town of Bangor in Northern Ireland. "They flickered at times, coming on and off at random intervals," said a witness. Another witness said: "There had been a strange on-off fog, like two pinky-peach sheens on the water". A video of this strange phenomenon can be seen at https://youtu.be/T5UH_hzT9X8. *Times*, 9 Mar 2019.

LOCKS RETURNED

The National Army Museum is to repatriate two locks of hair taken from the corpse of Theodore II (Tewodros II), Emperor of Ethiopia, seized during Sir Robert Napier's punitive military expedition to Abyssinia in 1868 that culminated in the Battle of Magdala. *D.Telegraph*, 5 Mar 2019.

BADGER BANDIT

Hannah Carver, 29, from Gosport, Hampshire, noticed food was disappearing from her freezer. One night the barmaid was sitting in her kitchen when a badger poked its head through the cat flap. She set up a camera and captured footage of the enterprising mammal opening the freezer and pulling the drawers out. It has consumed chicken, pork chops, mashed potato, ice cream and ice-lollies. *The News (Portsmouth)*, *D.Mail*, 22 May 2019.



ARCTIC FOX'S EPIC TREK | Plus other icy odysseys



ELISE STRØMSEN / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

ABOVE: An Arctic fox is fitted with a collar bearing a GPS tracking device. **BELOW:** A map showing the young fox's 2,000-mile trek.

A young Arctic fox has walked across the ice from Norway's Svalbard islands to northern Canada in an epic journey, covering 3,506km (2,176 miles) in 76 days. Researchers at Norway's Polar Institute fitted the young female coastal or blue fox with a GPS tracking device and freed her into the wild on 26 March 2018 on the east coast of Spitsbergen, the Svalbard archipelago's main island. The fox was under a year old when she set off west in search of food, reaching Greenland just 21 days later – a journey of 1,512km (940 miles) – before trudging forward on the second leg of her trek across sea ice and tundra. She was tracked to Canada's Ellesmere Island, nearly 2,000km (1,243 miles) further, just 76 days after leaving Svalbard.

What amazed the researchers was not so much the length of the journey as the speed with which the fox had covered it – averaging just over 46km (28.5 miles) a day and sometimes covering 155km (96 miles). "We couldn't believe our eyes at first," said Eva Fuglei of the Polar Institute. "We thought



perhaps it was dead, or had been carried there on a boat, but no boats could travel that far north through the ice." No fox has been recorded to travel that far that fast before. The Polar Institute produced a graph that shows how the fox made two breaks in her journey across northern Greenland. She may have curled up in the snow to sit out bad weather, which is perfectly possible with such thick protective fur, or else found a source of food like seabirds in an open channel of water. The fox's tracking collar stopped transmitting in February 2019, so her ultimate fate is unknown.

The shrinking of the polar ice

pack is having an impact on Arctic foxes – they can no longer visit Iceland, for example, and in due course the population in Svalbard could become completely isolated. But Eva Fuglei said that there is still hope, as "higher temperatures could mean more Svalbard reindeer, and the foxes scavenge off their carcasses". *BBC News*, *Guardian*, 2 July; *NY Times*, 4 July 2019.

• An Arctic tern flew nearly 1.5 million miles – equivalent to three round trips to the Moon – in its 32 years. The remains of the record-breaking seabird, ringed as a chick, were found at an Aberdeenshire nature reserve. *D.Mirror*, 9 July 2019.

• In June, a polar bear travelled hundreds of miles from its usual hunting grounds before wandering into the Russian industrial city of Norilsk, the first time one of the animals had been seen in the area for 40 years. This was just the latest in a string of reports this year of polar bears travelling long distances to look for food as their sea-ice habitats are impacted by climate change. *Guardian*, 18 June 2019.



ROCKY'S SPACE ROCK | Rude awakening for dog yields meteorite find



PHOTOS COURTESY MIKE FARMER

ABOVE: Meteorite collector Mike Farmer, who donated samples of the meteorite to Arizona State University, is pictured here in Aguas Zarcas with Rocky and another dog, both unharmed by the crashing space rock. **BELOW:** The meteorite fragment.

Rocky was napping in his kennel in Costa Rica on 23 April 2019 when a small meteorite punctured the roof. Thankfully, the dog was unharmed.

The extraterrestrial missile was part of a clay-rich carbonaceous chondrite that crashed to Earth over the town of Aguas Zarcas. Clay-rich meteorites preserve water-rich minerals from space. The original meteorite was estimated to be about the size of a washing machine when it entered Earth's atmosphere.

"It formed in an environment free of life, then was preserved in the cold and vacuum of space for 4.56 billion years, and then dropped in Costa Rica last week," said Laurence Garvie, a curator at Arizona State University's Center for Meteorite Studies. Garvie and his colleagues are analysing fragments collected in the five days after the Aguas Zarcas meteorite fell. Luckily, those days were all dry, preventing rain from eating away at the meteorites, which are now preserved in nitrogen cabinets. "If you left this carbonaceous



"It was preserved in the vacuum of space for 4.56 billion years"

chondrite in the air, it would lose some of its extraterrestrial affinities," Garvie explained. "These meteorites have to be curated in a way that they can be used for current and

future research." Because the Aguas Zarcas meteorite was a carbonaceous chondrite, it was mostly clay, prompting Garvie to describe it as a mud ball. The high clay content means that scientists may be able to use these meteorites to better understand how we could one day pull water out of asteroids to turn into drinkable water or rocket fuel. In addition, they should contain trace information about the earliest days of the Solar System. *space.com*, 22 May 2019.

SIDELINES...

UNSINKABLE

After escaping from the *Titanic* on a lifeboat in 1912, London-born coal stoker George Beauchamp was on the *Lusitania* in 1915, when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat, killing 1,198. Once again he had a lucky escape, the only person to survive both disasters. Death finally claimed him in 1944, aged 72. The *Titanic* death toll was at least 1,490. *D.Express*, *D.Mirror*, 24 April 2019.

NOT YET EXTINCT

A tortoise from a species not seen for more than 110 years and thought to be extinct has been found on the Galapagos island of Fernandina. The female *Chelonoidis phantasticus*, also known as the Fernandina giant tortoise, is over 100 years old and is probably not alone. *Times*, 21 Feb 2019.

DUNNY TROUBLE

Last November, a man aged 45 needed 15 stitches in his penis after a 10ft (3m) python bit it after slithering out of a lavatory in Bangkok. In September 2016, a 21-year-old Australian called Jordan was bitten on the penis by a venomous spider while using a portable loo on a Sydney building site. The same thing had happened to him five months earlier. *BBC News*, 28 Sept 2016; *D.Star*, 10 Nov 2018.

ORIENTAL WISDOM

To relieve severe constipation, a Chinese man called Mr Chen, 79, inserted a large ceramic spoon up his bottom, but it got stuck and he ended up in hospital. By way of explanation, he said: "If you climb enough mountains, you'll eventually meet a tiger". *Metro*, 31 May 2019.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

WALKING WEED

A 46-year-old Wisconsin woman with the real given name of Marijuana Pepsi Vandyk was awarded a doctorate last May. Her dissertation was entitled: "Black names in white classrooms: Teacher behaviours and student perceptions". *D.Mirror*, 22 June 2019.

SLUGGISH BUREAUCRACY

On 7 June, after 134 years and 10 architects, Barcelona's modernist masterpiece the Sagrada Família was finally granted a building permit. It had been pending since 1885, when Antoni Gaudí submitted his plans. Work is planned to finish in 2026. *D.Telegraph*, 8 June 2019.

CRUISE CONTROL

Leonard Olsen, 70, was arrested in Lakeland, Florida, on 10 May after a policeman filmed him sitting on his sunroof while his Cadillac motored down the road at about 40mph (64km/h) on cruise control. Said Olsen: "I thought it would be a nice way to praise God for a minute... and that's what I did." He said he would rather be taken to jail than back to his wife, who "treats me like a servant." *News of the Weird*, 29 May 2019.

CAN YOU BEAT THAT?

An audiologist has removed what he believes to be the world's longest chunk of earwax – measuring 2.5cm – from a male patient in Oadby, Leicestershire. *Sun*, 20 June 2019.

SINGING SEALS

Researchers at the University of St Andrews have trained a grey seal called Zola to sing Old MacDonald Had a Farm, the Star Wars theme tune, and 10 notes of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. Two other seals were found to be able to copy human speech sounds, including vowels. *Sky News*, 20 Jun; *D.Telegraph*, 21 June 2019.

FLICS VERSUS FLEAS

A police station in northeast Paris, in the 19th district, had to be evacuated on 5 May after it was invaded by fleas. A sign of the front door said "Closed until further notice". Some police had taken the fleas with them, causing havoc back home. (*Queensland*) *Courier-Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 7 May 2019.

FOOD FACES



ABOVE: Matt Gordon discovered this Putin steak in Aldi. BELOW: Meanwhile, Morrisons in Margate produced this holy tortilla.

STEAK AND KIDNEY PUTIN

Musician Matt Gordon, 39, did a double-take when he saw this £2.99 Aberdeen Angus sizzle steak in the freezer section of his local Aldi in Croydon, south London. He thought it bore an uncanny resemblance to Vladimir Putin. "I walked past it a couple of times," he said, "and each time it looked more and more like Putin." He didn't buy it. *Sun*, 8 July 2019.

JESUS CRUST

A woman, named only as Lucy, 31, bought a tortilla from Morrisons in Margate, Kent, and made a halloumi wrap. "I tore off a bit and was about to dip it in hummus when I saw Jesus's face peering up at me. I couldn't eat it. It was just staring at me. I put the parts back together and lo and behold – the bottom half had a beard." *Sun*, 29 Mar 2019.



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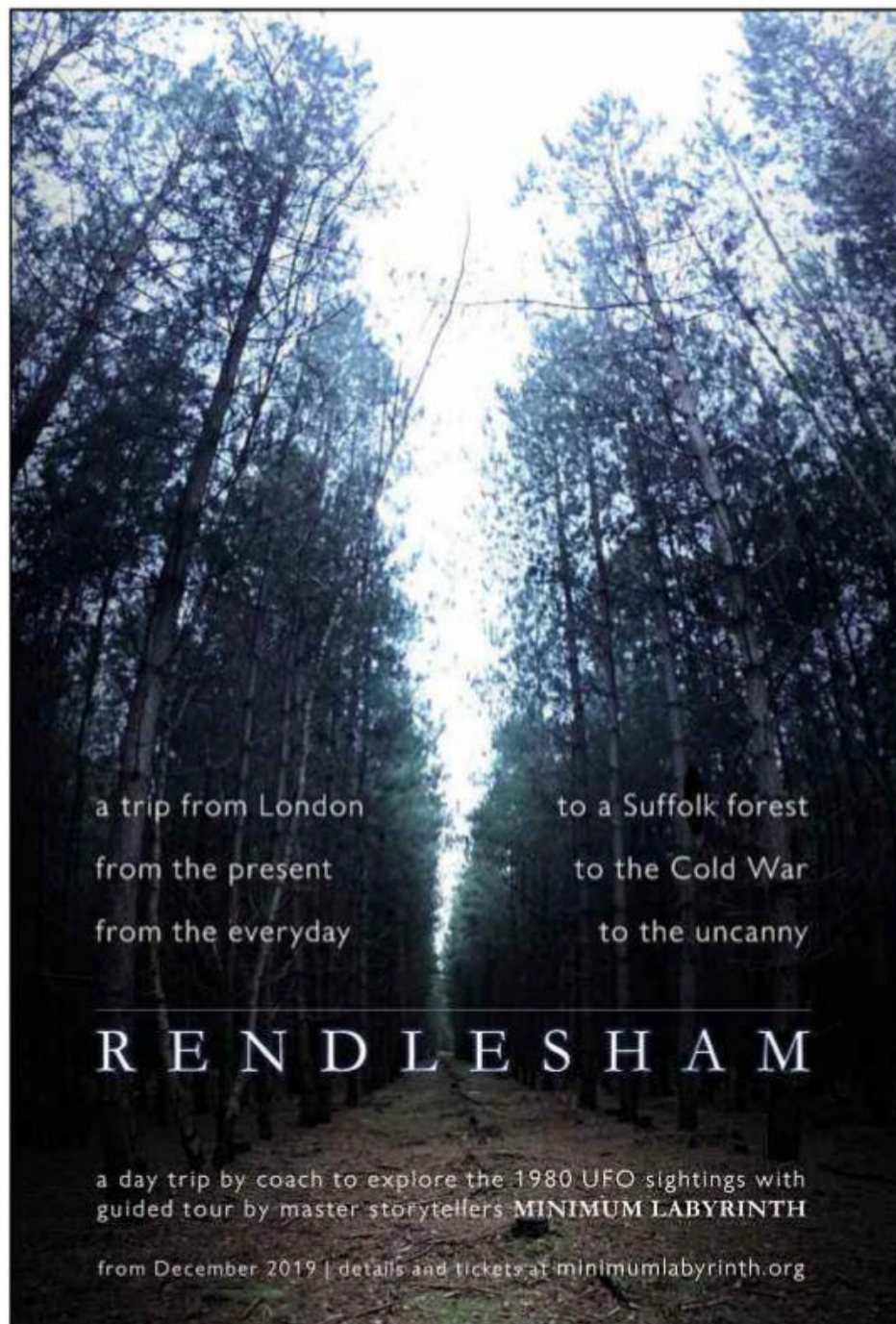


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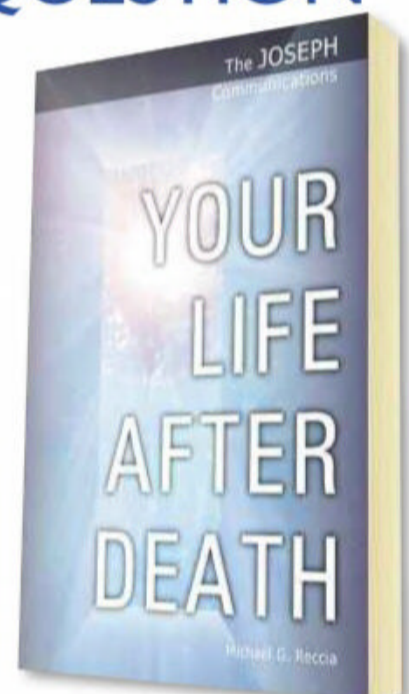
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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Religious belief and social media misinformation continue to provoke resistance to vaccination

VAXXED OFF [FT377:16-17, 380:26]



Ever since Andrew Wakefield's controversial (and now retracted) study published in *The Lancet* in 1998

that posited a link between autism and the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine, numerous other studies have been conducted, all refuting his theory. The latest, an extensive research project that analysed the medical records of over 657,000 children born in Denmark between 1999 and 2010, was published in *Annals of Internal Medicine* last March. Around 6,500 of these children had been diagnosed with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Once again, no causal connection between the MMR vaccine and ASD was found.

Wakefield's original 1998 study had focused on 12 children with developmental delays, eight of whom had been diagnosed with autism. Subsequent investigation found several conflicts of interest. These included payments by a law firm planning to sue the vaccine's manufacturer, and the lead researcher having developed and patented a "safer" measles vaccine prior to the publication of the 1998 study. The causal factors responsible for ASD are still unclear, but the March 2019 Denmark study did find higher risk in the following groups: boys; children born more recently (2008-2010); having one or more ASD-diagnosed siblings (it seems that the condition is partially genetic); older parents; low birth weight; a mother who smoked during pregnancy; and children who had received no early vaccinations. So, ironically, it's possible that anti-vaxxer parents who withdraw their young children from vaccination programmes may be *increasing* their risk of an ASD diagnosis.



ABOVE: A Jewish neighbourhood in Monsey, Rockland County, New York, where a measles outbreak among the Orthodox Jewish community has recently caused the county to bar unvaccinated minors from public places.

There are fears that measles may become endemic in Britain within 30 years unless compulsory vaccination for schoolchildren is introduced. NHS (National Health Service) England's chief executive Simon Stevens blamed 'anti-vaxxer' campaigners on social media for fuelling a rise in measles infections in England. 913 cases were reported between January and October 2018, compared with 259 in the whole of 2017, a 400 per cent increase. He warned that uptake of the MMR vaccine in England was down to 87.5 per cent, compared with a World Health Organisation (WHO) target of 95 per cent. MMR inoculation rates are lowest in London. It has been speculated that middle-class parents are the most vaccine-hesitant, since wealthy boroughs like Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster and Camden all recorded vaccination rates of 80 per cent or below.

Measles cases in Europe are now at a 20-year high. A UNICEF survey of 10 high-income countries found that Britain has the third-highest number of unvaccinated

children, with the USA heading the list and France in second place. The Wellcome Trust's study of 140 countries released in June 2019 found that 75 per cent of Brits agreed that vaccines are safe, a lower rate than those of the developing world, but higher than France, where only two-thirds of the population agree – the lowest rate in the world.

Some health authorities have barred children from attending school if they have not undergone certain vaccinations. In New York State last March, a lawsuit was brought against Rockland County's health department and commissioner. They are being sued by parents representing 44 students at Green Meadow Waldorf School, who had not received the measles jab and who were subsequently banned from school. The lawsuit claims "the medical benefits of the vaccination are debatable", and states that families' religious beliefs have been violated. Green Meadow Waldorf School follows the educational theories of Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophy movement. A Rockland County attorney

explained that the parents' reasons for seeking religious exemption from vaccination "run the gamut from references to organised Christian doctrine to a generalised spirituality. As the case progresses, we expect several of the exemptions to be challenged, as not evincing a sincere religious belief against vaccination."

The measures taken by Rockland County against non-vaccinated students are in response to a measles outbreak in the locality, the longest-lasting outbreak since the disease was officially eradicated from the United States in 2000. 145 cases were reported between October 2018 and March 2019. The current outbreak is most prevalent amongst ultra-Orthodox Jewish families living in Rockland, and this is also the case with other recent measles outbreaks, in Westchester County, and the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, NYC. It has been suggested that the closed nature of Hasidic communities may have led to 'vaccine-hesitancy' amidst a generalised mistrust of the wider world. Religious fatalism, the belief that God is in control



of the illness, rather than vaccines or health authorities, has also been proposed as a causal factor. Meanwhile, Westchester County health officials have expressed concern at so-called ‘measles parties’ in which children are deliberately exposed to the illness in order to build up immunity.

- In Australia, the anti-vaxxer movement has been given celebrity endorsement by the wife of a rugby star, Frank Winterstein of the Manly Sea Eagles. Taylor Winterstein proudly states she has not had her two children vaccinated, bills herself as an ‘integrative nutrition health coach’ and is running \$200 workshops to help other parents make an “informed choice”. When the cost of the workshops was queried by some of her social media followers, Winterstein responded by saying “I invite you to reflect on how you could be more resourceful with your money over the next few weeks”.

Also in Australia, it has been reported that some dog owners are refusing to have their pets vaccinated against parvovirus, 100 per cent fatal if untreated and 40 per cent fatal even if treated. The owners fear the vaccine could give their dogs autism. Vets in Britain have also noticed the trend; the PDSA (People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals) say that around 2.2 million UK dogs and 3.6 million cats remain unvaccinated. Consequently, vets are noticing an increase in parvovirus and leptospirosis cases.

In Italy, a populist politician who campaigned against children’s compulsory inoculation against six diseases, including measles and chickenpox, has been widely mocked after it became known that he had contracted chickenpox. Massimiliano Fedriga, a senior Northern League politician and governor of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region in northern Italy, was lampooned in a local carnival when a huge model of his head, covered in chickenpox blisters, was paraded through the

streets. Similarly, in Kentucky, a teenager who sued his school after they banned him for not being inoculated against chickenpox has subsequently contracted chickenpox. Jerome Kunkel, 18, does not regret his decision, as he regards vaccination as “immoral, illegal and sinful”.

Meanwhile, in Ohio, a teenager has defied his mother’s wishes and has been vaccinated. Ethan Lindenberger had to wait until he was 18 and no longer required parental permission. Speaking to a Senate health committee, Lindenberger explained that his mother was by no means unique and that many parents had been swayed by false information on Facebook.

- Dr Gregory Poland, director of the Mayo Clinic’s Vaccine Research Group with 30 years’ experience in the vaccine field, spoke of the pernicious effects of social media. “I will explain to a patient in detail the answer to their question and they’ll look at me and say, ‘Yeah, but I saw on Facebook that...’”

Social media has also been blamed for rising numbers of people rejecting conventional cancer treatments (surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy),

instead resorting to alternative cancer cures like raw fruit diets, seaweed, turmeric, and hyperbaric oxygen chambers.

An extensive Wellcome Trust study of worldwide attitudes towards vaccination was published last June. The study interviewed 140,000 people in 140 countries. Participants were asked whether they agreed with the statement that vaccines are safe to use. Eastern Europeans are the most ‘vaccine-hesitant’ people, with only 50 per cent agreeing that vaccines are safe. The most ‘vaccine-confident’ area was South Asia, with 95 per cent agreement.

But although South Asians as a whole strongly approve of vaccines, there are some local exceptions. Certain regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, for example, harbour much suspicion about the polio vaccine. Is it a Western plot to sterilise Muslims, or *haram* (forbidden) because the vaccine contains pig fat? In 2000, Pakistan’s government began a mass vaccination programme. They employ an estimated 262,000 vaccine workers who go door-to-door offering polio drops to all children under five. 70 per cent of these polio workers are women; they are more likely to be admitted

inside a stranger’s home, and the paid work is an employment opportunity for less educated women; but it is a dangerous job. As well as suspicions about the vaccine itself, some mullahs regard female polio workers as spreading “indecent” and declared it the duty of Muslim men to forcibly marry them. In some areas, polio workers are accompanied by police escorts, but even this has not ensured everyone’s safety. Since 2012, 94 health workers and security personnel have been murdered as a result of an organised anti-vaccinator campaign.

Polio workers have also been accused of spying for the US, and have been blamed for the accuracy of US drone attacks on militants’ bases. Elsewhere in Pakistan, shortly after the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, a doctor was arrested on suspicion of assisting the CIA in its hunt for the fugitive al-Qaeda leader.

It was alleged that Dr Shakil Afridi’s door-to-door house visits offering a free hepatitis vaccine were merely a pretext to discover Bin Laden’s whereabouts, or to obtain his blood (and therefore DNA) sample. Dr Afridi was sentenced to 33 years imprisonment on unrelated charges. But for others, Afridi is merely a scapegoat, framed by the CIA to protect the identity of another Pakistani agent who really had been responsible for locating and identifying Bin Laden. Whatever the truth, the rumours and suspicion surrounding the affair have damaged the credibility of Pakistan’s vaccination programmes.

BBC News, 6 Oct 2011, 8 May 2019; *Washington Post*, 22 Jan 2018; *S. Telegraph*, 24 Feb, 31 Mar, 23 June; *NY Times Int. Ed.*, 26 Feb; *D. Telegraph*, 2+27 Mar, 17 May, 3+19+24 June; *livescience.com*, 4 Mar; <i>, 7 Mar; *dailytelegraph.com.au*, 11 Mar, 2 April; (Sydney) *D. Telegraph*, 12 Mar; *eu.lohud.com*, 12 Mar, 10 April; *Times*, 20 Mar; *samaa.tv*, 23 April; *healio.com*, 31 May; ‘Polio: the final battle’ by Shumaila Jaffery, (*BBC News*), June 2019; *wellcome.ac.uk*, 19 June 2019. Christopher Josiffe



ABOVE: A Pakistani health worker administers polio vaccine drops to Afghan refugee children during a polio vaccination campaign in Lahore earlier this year.



FAKE PANICS

Children are the victims as anti-vaxxers try to sabotage Pakistan's anti-polio campaign and Italian 'carers' are accused of fabricating a sexual abuse scare

ANDREA RONCHINI / NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES



A village school's headmaster in a Peshawar suburb had previously refused permission for his schoolchildren to be inoculated against polio, but after pressure from Pakistan's government, he gave in, and allowed health workers into the school. Shortly after the children's inoculation, the headmaster telephoned parents claiming that dozens of children had begun fainting and vomiting. Taken to hospital and examined, they were all found to have no symptoms and were discharged. What at first appeared to be a case of mass hysteria [see FT253:30-37, 316:36-40], now looks like a deliberate attempt to sabotage the government's anti-polio campaign (see also p13).

After discovering malicious messages and videos circulated on social media, one of which showed a man instructing schoolboys to lie down on hospital cots and pretend to be sick, police arrested 16 people, including several staff members at the school. Officials denounced the false reports, asking Facebook to remove the offending posts, but it was too late. Angry parents converged on a local government health facility, kicking down its gates, ransacking the building and

then setting it alight. This was all broadcast live on local television, thus spreading panic still further, as local imams urged parents to take their recently vaccinated children to hospital immediately. In total, around 30,000 children from various Peshawar schools were examined in hospitals; all were found to be symptom-free.

- And in another instance of adults compelling children to display fraudulent symptoms, Italian police in the northern town of Reggio Emilia have arrested 18 people, including psychotherapists, doctors, social workers, and the mayor of nearby Bibbiano. They are accused of having brainwashed vulnerable

children into thinking their parents had abused them, so that they could then be sold to foster parents. The police investigation, begun in 2018 and codenamed 'Angels and Demons', exposed an alleged network of 'carers' whose various methods were designed to make the children believe themselves to be the victims of sexual abuse. The 'carers' are accused of having forged child-like drawings with sexual connotations, and of using electroshock therapy to create false abuse memories, while the therapists are accused of having dressed up as 'wicked' children's story characters. Police claim the children were then sold to foster families for cash, while the network kept gifts and letters sent to the children by their real parents hidden in a warehouse. Some of the foster parents have been accused of sexually abusing the children they had 'bought'. Police have not yet revealed how many children were affected, or of what age, but stated that hundreds of thousands of euros were involved. *samaa.tv*, 23 April; *washingtonpost.com*, 10 May; *thelocal.it*, 28 June 2019.



ABDUL MAJEED / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: People demonstrate on the Piazza Montecitorio, Bibbiano, to highlight the findings of the 'Angels and Demons' investigation. ABOVE: This Peshawar health centre was torched by a mob after false claims circulated of children made ill by polio vaccinations.



The sweet smell of (sexual) success

DAVID HAMBLING detects a dubious whiff to claims about the discovery of human pheromones

The mystery of human attraction has long fascinated poets, scientists and entrepreneurs. If you could only find the elusive something that makes a person irresistible to the opposite sex and bottle it, you could win a Nobel Prize – and make a fortune. No wonder that so much effort has gone into doing just that, and the field of human sexual pheromone research has been such a lively one. But the science may not be quite as straightforward as its proponents suggest.

Pheromones are signals carried by smell, chemicals released by animals that affect the behaviour of others of the same species. The insect world supplies some of the most impressive examples. Moths that fly by night cannot find mates by sight or sound, so they rely on smell. The male Luna moth is the record-holder, able to find a female from over six miles (9.7km) away simply by tracking back her scent on the wind. The moths have receptors on their antennae able to detect the odour of a female, and, from the difference in the strength between scents on each antenna, the males steer a way towards the object of their affection.

Actually isolating the substances involved was challenging because the quantities are so tiny. In the 1950s German biologists succeeded in identifying the pheromones of the silkworm moth. By the 1970s, a number of insect pheromones had been identified and synthesised in quantity for pest control. Rather than using insecticide, farmers spray fields with pheromones for sawfly and codling moth, saturating the area so that males and females cannot find each other to mate, causing numbers to drop off dramatically.

More commercial applications followed, including the isolation of pheromones affecting mammals. Pig farmers use pheromones to increase the chances of impregnation and reduce aggression in their stock. Cat owners can get pheromone diffusers to reduce their pets' anxiety and aggressive behaviour. Dog collars can contain pheromone-releasing devices to reduce barking and stress.

Other researchers always had their sights on a bigger prize: pheromones to affect human behaviour. Specifically, they wanted something that would attract mates as effectively as a Luna moth. There had long been suggestions that some chemical component of male sweat would attract



LEFT: The Luna moth relies on smell to find a mate – but do we?

sweat – show that people cannot distinguish between male and female secretions. Both men and women found the male secretions slightly more pleasant, so if there is any difference it is not targeting the opposite sex.

Other scientists raised anatomic objections to the theory that humans attract each other by sex pheromones. Mammals like cats and pigs have Jacobson's Organ, also known as the vomeronasal

organ, a second smell receptor in the nose sensitive to pheromones. In humans, this organ exists but is vestigial. Worse, it lacks any nerve connections: it is not plugged in. It seems humans lost the ability to receive this type of signal somewhere in our evolutionary history.

A 2017 study by the Royal Society found that two putative human pheromones had no effect on how attractive people seemed, and concluded that the two substances isolated by Erox should not be labelled as putative human pheromones.

(Meanwhile the Pentagon has also explored the use of human pheromones, specifically those signalling danger, with the aim of using the smell of fear to disrupt their opponents. Reported in **FT132:14-15**, these do not appear to have come to anything.)

None of this means that human pheromone sprays are necessarily useless, or that positive reports are lies. Many people believe the sprays have worked wonders in helping them to attract partners. However, the power of the placebo effect needs to be considered. The added confidence provided by the spray may very well make the wearer that much more successful. Or it may simply be that they attribute any success to pheromones when they use them, as a football manager comes to believe in his lucky suit, lucky tie or lucky socks.

As some researchers have noted, humans are not moths and our mating behaviour is considerably more complex. It looks like attraction is not simply a matter of pheromones. But research into this potentially lucrative area is likely to continue. Just as there is an endless market for useless aphrodisiac formulæ, as long as there are people willing to pay money for them, the stream of alleged human pheromones will continue.

women, but the mysterious ingredient had never been identified. Some excitable popular science writers had suggested that pheromones might be at work, and the idea entered the popular consciousness.

While perfumers blended musk and other animal ingredients in their products, they never claimed to have found an attractant that was always effective.

In 1991 a company called Erox Corporation sponsored a conference on smell in mammals. They had an ulterior motive: one of the studies in the conference claimed to have discovered "putative human pheromones", one male and one female, which elicited responses when injected into the nose. The supposed pheromones had been supplied by Erox themselves, and are incorporated into their perfumes to help make the wearer irresistible.

Several research papers followed and appeared to confirm these results. The problem is that papers with negative results tend not to get published, and some positive results may be the result of chance or poorly designed experiments. While Erox continue to sell the "functional fragrance" with the two alleged human pheromones, scientists have retreated from the notion that such pheromones even exist.

As Prof Richard Doty of University of Pennsylvania Smell and Taste Centre notes in a 2015 textbook, *Neurobiology of Human Communication*, the putative human pheromones are by no means chemicals unique to humans, but are common in the animal and plant kingdoms. They are even found in parsnips and celery. Doty notes that despite half a century of research on the subject, "no chemical or simple set of chemicals has been identified that could be construed as a human pheromone."

Extensive blind testing with axillary gland secretions – essentially purified

PAUL SIEVEKING digs up a wooden arm, a rabbit's leg and a mysterious mouth plaque...

ROMAN FINDS

- A small, flat golden plate found in 1872 alongside a female skeleton beneath York station has now been identified as a Roman mouth plaque dating from the third century AD. It is the only example of its kind in Britain, and one of only 23 discovered worldwide. Such a plaque was used to cover the mouth of a dead person of high status, but its function is a mystery. Was it a magical or medicinal amulet to protect the person in death, or a sinister talisman to silence or restrain them? Adam Parker, Yorkshire Museum's assistant curator of archaeology, said most of the other mouth plaques were found in Syria, Turkey and Crimea, apart from one found in France. He hoped that DNA testing and stable isotope analysis of the skeleton would show a link to these eastern reaches of the Empire. The woman is believed to have been between 18 and 30 when she died, and along with the mouth plaque she was buried with a counterfeit denarius of Septimius Severus dated AD 202-210, made of copper coated with silver. Septimius Severus ruled from 193 until his death in York in 211, but it is not clear whether the woman was buried during this period or later. [PA] *Independent*, 24 Oct 2018.

- A wooden arm has been recovered from a Roman well at the Warth Park industrial estate in Raunds, Northamptonshire (close to a 4,000-year-old 'henge' excavated in 2018). The arm was carbon dated to between AD 86 and 240, and might have been a votive offering, according to wood specialist Michael Bamforth, who said it was "carved from a single branch, which makes use of a natural curve to form the elbow, and is very well made, as no tool marks are visible on its surface". The "slender and gracile" nature of the hand suggested it had been modelled to mimic that "of a small adult or adolescent". It did not belong to a full sculpture, as there was no trace of jointing. *BBC News*, 22 June 2019.

- A fragment of leg bone from what is proclaimed to be Britain's earliest rabbit, dating from the first century AD, has been found in Fishbourne Palace, West Sussex, suggesting that the species arrived more than a millennium earlier than some academics had argued. Marcus Terrentius Voro wrote that the legions brought rabbits from Spain, but until now there had been no firm archaeological evidence to back this up. The 4cm (1.6in) segment of tibia was unearthed in 1964. It was shut away in a box, unrecognised for what it was, until 2017. Rabbit bones had previously been found at Roman sites, but it was possible that these creatures had burrowed into the earth long after the Roman Empire had retreated. The carbon dating of the new find rules that out. The bone does not bear



ABOVE: Yorkshire Museum's Assistant Curator of Archaeology, Adam Parker, holds a third-century golden 'mouth plaque' used to cover the mouth of a dead person of high status. BELOW: The wooden arm found at Raunds.

any butchery marks, leading archaeologists to think that the rabbit was kept in confinement. The first inhabitants of Fishbourne Palace – the largest residential Roman building discovered in Britain, built in AD 75 – are known to have been wealthy and to have kept a varied menagerie. It seems possible that they had the rabbit as a pet. The first reference to rabbits in England may have been in 1176, when Richard de Wyka, a landowner of the Isles of Scilly, mentioned them in a discussion of tythes he owed. In 1235 Henry III made a gift of 10 rabbits raised in Guildford – the first documentary evidence of them on mainland Britain. However, six late Iron Age or early Roman butchered rabbit bones were discovered at Lynford in Norfolk in 2002 and fully published in 2005 (*Norfolk Archaeology* 44, 676-701). Also, the Welsh word for rabbit, *cwningen* (plural *cwningod*) is similar to the Italian *coniglio* and Spanish *conejo*, indicative of a connection going back to Roman times. *Times*, 18 April; *Guardian*, 18+19 April 2019.

- In July 2018, the remains of a huge Roman bathtub were discovered in Chichester Priory Park, in Chichester, West Sussex. It is described as a "luxurious tub made from mortar, tiles and bricks". The remains of Roman buildings had been found on the site. Dig director James Kenny said the size of the bath indicated it was owned by people of high status. "Just to keep it going would have required huge wealth and resources," he said. "It would have been filled with really hot water, and for the owner to be able to use it throughout the year, it would have required staggering amounts of charcoal, and a considerable amount of tending and stoking to keep it going." *Sunday Telegraph*, 22 July 2018.

- A terraced Roman villa – second only in size to Fishbourne Palace and almost as big as Buckingham Palace – has been unearthed in a four-month excavation. The 278ft by 278ft (85x85m) foundations, dating to AD 99, were located in a field close to Broughton Castle near Banbury, Oxfordshire, on land belonging to Martin Fiennes, second cousin of Sir Ranulph Fiennes, the explorer, and *Harry Potter* actor Ralph. Detectorist Keith Westcott, 55, organised the dig after being told by John Taylor, a farmer, that he had ploughed into a large stone in 1963. This turned out to be a sarcophagus of a high-status woman who had died in the third or fourth century. Other finds include coins and an enormous boar tusk. So far, only about one per cent of the site has been uncovered. <i>24 Aug; D.Telegraph, Sun, 25 Aug 2018.

- Remains of one of the most significant small Roman towns, covering 18 acres (7.3ha), have been found next to the A2 in Newington, near Sittingbourne in Kent. The site will soon be covered by 124 new houses, built by developer Persimmon Homes. Finds include a temple, pottery, rare coins, jewellery, furnaces and a 23ft (7m) wide road. Chairman of Newington History Group, Dean Coles, said: "We already had evidence of a Roman burial ground and Roman occupation in the immediate vicinity and this excavation shows there was a thriving manufacturing site in the heart of our village. The temple and major road are massive discoveries. It proves the A2 wasn't the only Roman road through the village. As a group, we are keen to trace the route... of this new 'highway', which may have connected with another temple excavated 50 years ago on the outskirts of Newington and a villa unearthed in 1882." *kentononline.co.uk*, 23 May 2019.





CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

240: COGITO, ERGO WHAT?

“Belief in God – in Nothing – in Einstein – a matter of fashion... I conceive of nothing in religion, science, or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while” – Fort, *Books*, p993

From the old (1962-3) BBC satirical weekly, ‘That Was The Week That Was’:

Prison Warder to Bertrand Russell (arrested for CND militancy): What do you do?

BR: I’m a philosopher. I think.

PW: Well, do you think you could clean those lavatories?

Most of what follows comes from Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* (probably, third-century AD – Loeb and online translations available). Bear in mind that almost all pre-Socratic philosophical writings are lost; we depend, as sometimes did Diogenes himself, on second/third hand fragments and extracts. There are first-rate collections of translations with linking commentaries by GS Kirk / JE Raven / M Schofield (1983) and Daniel Graham (2010).

The first three philosopher-scientists all came from Miletus. As well as its famous dyes, this city had a raffish reputation, being credited also with the invention of dildos and double beds. Other notable products included Pericles’s mistress Aspasia, a Milesian brothel-monger until run out of town for being “too obscene”, and pornography which supposedly explained the Roman defeat by Parthians (53 BC), its enfeebled soldiers’ knapsacks being found full of racy Milesian novels.

(This trio, and their successors down to Socrates – my terminal point – all operated in the sixth and fifth centuries BC.) First came Thales, the original absent-minded professor. Whilst star-gazing, he fell down a well – “Well in,” as the dormouse said to Alice. Just as his Athenian friend Solon tipped off his friends to borrow money because he was planning to cancel all debts, Thales made a packet with some fiddle involving the buying and selling of oil-presses – political corruption has a distinguished classical pedigree. Thales also helped King Cræsus capture a town by diverting a river course. King Cyrus would do the same when besieging Babylon – we need these engineering minds for better flood protection. Having been the first Greek – Babylonian astronomers had long



preceded – to predict a solar eclipse (585 BC), only right that Thales should expire from sunstroke while watching the Olympic Games.

Next came Anaximander, first Greek – again, the Babylonians had been ahead – to devise a sundial, also – not to put the cartographer before the horse – first man to draw an atlas and construct a globe. Otherwise, he is known only for being jeered at by children for his bad singing – Thales had never wanted any children, saying they would be a nuisance to his work (thus anticipating Cyril Connolly – *Enemies of Promise* – on “the pram in the hall”) – and for achieving a synchronous death with the latter. Just as Thales predicted a solar eclipse and calmed people’s fears by explaining it, so Anaximander is said to have warned the Spartans to leave their city for open country because an earthquake was imminent. Modern seismologists say nobody can predict one so accurately. None of them is going to wake up one morning in LA and say “The Big One is coming today, get into your cars now!” Sparta would actually be devastated by a massive quake well after Anaximander’s death. However, the one that destroyed Helike in 373 BC

was said by Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, bk7 ch24 paras7-8) to have been presaged by flames flickering across the sky, and modern seismologists concede some such reports are credible – Fort (pp240-1) is full of them. See also “Shake, rattle and glow” [FT382:44-49].

Several ancient writers say all animals and vermin fled Helike five days before the earthquake hit. Such predicative exoduses were widely believed in by the Greeks. Thessalians, for example, attributed this prescience to storks. Superstitious inhabitants blamed the quake on the wrath of Poseidon over a statue of his – one was subsequently discovered, submerged. Such attitudes percolated down to the Byzantines, whose word for earthquake was *Theomania* = Wrath of God.

Incidentally, Adalberto Giovanni (*Museum Helveticum* 42, 1985, 151-6) thinks Plato might have been inspired by the Helike quake to pen his Atlantis fable [FT163:21].

Third, and resoundingly last (gets a bare page from Diogenes) was Anaximenes, who was obsessed with Air as the basic principle of life – Thales had proposed Water, Anaximander a

woolly concept of ‘The Infinite’ – being also an early Flat-Earther, as were Thales and several others, the former believing the Earth floated on water, the latter on air.

Still, our trio of Milesians have all been honoured by NASA’s naming of lunar craters after them.

Haris Vlavianos, *The History of Western Philosophy in 100 Haiku* (2015) hits off our Milesian trio thus:

THALES:

Gazing at the sky,
You’re bound to fall into the well.
Searching for Water!

ANAXIMANDER:

The Big Bang? Hubris!
I’ll put things in order. Time?
There’s infinity!

ANAXIMENES:

Oh, I’m fed up with
Infinite airy nonsense!
There I go again!

“If nobody looks up, or checks up, what the astronomers tell us, they are free to tell us whatever they want to tell us. Their system is a slippery imposition of evasions that cannot be checked up, or that for various reasons, are not checked up” – Fort, p720.



A question of survival

ALAN MURDIE examines the various attitudes to the afterlife displayed by prominent ghost hunters

Conversing recently with an Anglican minister from the south of England, I learned how local fellow clergy had just attended a special diocesan training session devoted to deliverance ministry, what is popularly (and frequently inaccurately) called exorcism. Prompting this initiative have been spiralling calls for pastoral help received from people declaring themselves haunted by the recently dead, typically individuals known to them in life as close relatives and friends.

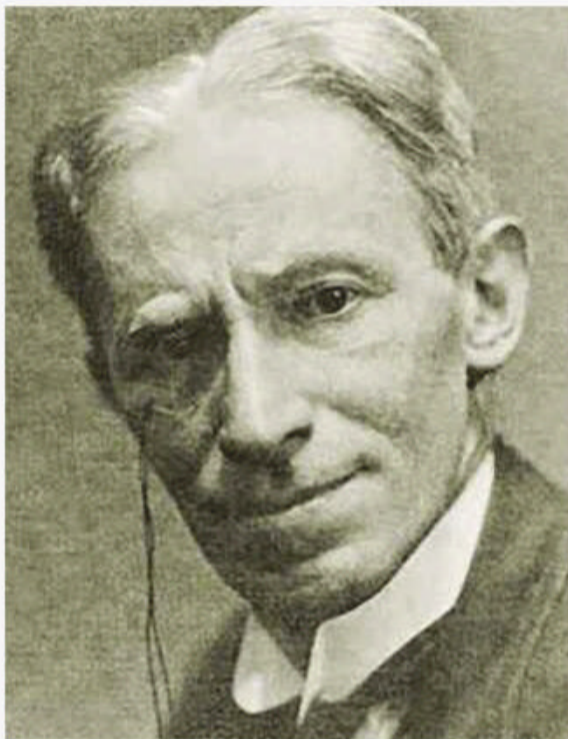
To such appeals the response of the Church is sympathetic counselling, simple blessings and prayer, rather than the full rite of exorcism (the use of which is exceedingly rare). As to what exactly may be triggering this marked increase in calls for spiritual help, this is not of primary concern of the Church, the clergy being more concerned with ministering effectively to those seeking help. However, one suggestion has been that this is a direct consequence of the rise in humanist funerals. Secular ceremonies are conceived, arranged and performed so as to omit any elements of praying for the repose of the souls of the dead. Are the dead, thus deprived of more traditional sacred rites, failing to find rest?

Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961) considered that every thinking person ought to have a conception as to what may happen with individual consciousness after physical death. In his last and posthumous book, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, Jung stated that a person “should be able to say he has done his best to form a conception of life after death, or create some image of it – even if he must confess his failure. Not to have done so is a vital loss”. Jung saw this as a necessity to realise one’s position in the bigger picture of the world at large.

What have Britain’s best-known ghost hunters of the last century had to say on survival after death?

It is often assumed that ghost hunters ‘believe in ghosts’ in the sense of viewing them as spirits of the dead, but familiarity with the work and writings of many of the best known since the start of the 20th century shows this is far from the case. Many were uncertain as to whether ghosts were actually the dead coming back and some expressly rejected such an idea.

Having been fortunate enough to know a number of these leading researchers personally, and to have received much help, inspiration and guidance from them in my own early years in psychical research, I am pleased to share what I gleaned as their



ABOVE: Elliott O'Donnell (l) and R Thurston Hopkins (r) imagined an afterlife full of malevolent entities.

The ghost hunter was often indistinguishable from the spirit raiser or necromancer

thoughts on this ultimate question. These were researchers all active in the period 1900-2000, which may be seen historically as the time when the modern conception of ghost hunting developed, in the sense of actively seeking out scientific evidence of localised hauntings. I can vouch for the fact that they entertained no unified or consistent view on life after death and were deeply divided as to the interpretation of the evidence they gathered.

In their endeavours, these researchers were very much pioneers. It should be remembered that ghost hunting, as popularly perceived and practised today, is not very old as an activity, pastime or profession. Many of the techniques they adopted are seen now as routine, but with many basic precautions and safeguards they promoted blithely omitted by imitators today, on both sides of the Atlantic. Regrettably, many would-be investigators of today behave in ways that fall far short of the standards and protocols originally envisaged, consequently attracting extensive and often justified criticism (e.g. in *Scientifical Americans: The*

Culture of Amateur Paranormal Researchers (2017) by Sharon Hill; *Investigating Ghosts: The Scientific Search for Spirits* (2017) by Benjamin Radford).

Prior to the 1870s, the ghost hunter was often indistinguishable from the spirit raiser or necromancer, or approached manifestations via static sittings and experiments conducted with mediums (I omit here instances of mass ghost hunting in urban communities that broke out periodically when crowds went hunting phantoms such as ‘Spring-heeled Jack’). In those days, you invited the ghosts to come to you to communicate, usually via a human medium or a device such as a planchette or –from 1892 – the Ouija board.

This pre-scientific approach remained well represented well into the first half of the 20th century by two ghost hunters and prolific authors, Elliot O'Donnell and Robert Thurston Hopkins.

O'Donnell took up ghost hunting “as an occupation” in the 1890s and was, for nearly 60 years, one of the most active ghost hunters in Britain. He was convinced of survival, but the dead in his books plainly do not rest in peace. O'Donnell is the ‘Penny Dreadful’ dramatist of early 20th century ghost hunters; he didn’t just chase ghosts, they also chased him. Eschewing psychical research and conventional religious interpretations (in spite of his father being a clergyman), he detested Spiritualism, condemning it as either fraud or ‘a menace’.

One may agree with the verdict of the master of the literary ghost story, MR James, who commented in 1924 concerning O'Donnell's output: "I do not know whether to class [his accounts] as narratives of fact or exercises in fiction. I hope they may be of the latter sort, for life in a world managed by his gods and infested by his demons seems a risky business."

O'Donnell's conception of an afterlife, so far as it can be ascertained, could be characterised as being closest to that of ancient Mesopotamia or presented in occult literature. O'Donnell places himself in the midst of a frightening world, crammed full of scary and malevolent entities who return to vex the living. He assures us that the most outrageous and evil earthbound entities cause illness, death and insanity and incite weak people into committing crimes. Good seldom triumphs in these stories, but occasionally the terror is relieved by benign spectres from some other realm, hinting at a calmer, more indeterminate and possibly Christian-orientated cosmos. The majority of his stories can be dismissed as unreliable or complete fictions, often lifted from other sources.

Much the same may be said of many of stories regaled by R Thurston Hopkins (1875-1958), one ghost hunter of whom O'Donnell actually approved, perhaps because their works share resemblances. A journalistic craftsman of the grotesque, his tales are also a mixture of sensational fact and shameless invention, or embellished folkloric fragments. His spectres may have a nasty face comparable with a "wizened pig's bladder" or a "wizened bladder of lard" (such as the naked ghost of Rattlesden Rectory, Suffolk). Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising to have found Thurston Hopkins expressing doubts himself about survival, expressed in passing in a short article in a local paper which mentioned the vaguely eerie atmosphere of Warren Lodge, Norfolk, once a small leper hospital. Conscious of his advancing age, he reflected that in a few years he would discover himself whether there was life after death. Such doubts did not restrain him later imagining a bloodcurdling ghost attached to the same site, before he died in 1958 (See *Adventures with Phantoms* (1946); *Ghosts Over England* (1953); *Bury Free Press*, 7 Dec 1941.)

One ghost hunter crossing the boundary between the spirit-raising period and a more scientific approach was Sir Shane Leslie (1885-1971). A devout Roman Catholic, he tackled a haunting at Corpus Christi College in 1904 with exorcism but later joined the Society for Psychical Research.



ABOVE: Warren Lodge, Norfolk, to which Thurston Hopkins attached an imaginary ghost.

While maintaining a strictly Catholic view of the afterlife (see *Shane Leslie's Ghost Book*, 1955) he emphasised the importance of evidence and would correct any errors he subsequently found in his writings, stating "it is the duty of a member of the S.P.R. to dissolve untrue ghost stories as well as to record well-witnessed ones." (*Journal of the SPR*, 1955, vol.38, no.687).

The most famous ghost hunter of the first half of the 20th century was Harry Price (1881-1948), who presented himself as a scientist in his approach to investigations and also ensured the maximum publicity for his activities wherever possible. Still admired today by many as 'the Prince of Ghost Hunters', he popularised the idea of taking measuring instruments on ghost hunts, giving his vigils at least a scientific gloss. However, his 'Blue Book of Instructions' issued to ghost hunting volunteers monitoring the notorious Borley Rectory in Essex clearly accepts the possibility that its phantom nun was an unquiet spirit.

The later discovery of what was taken to be part of her jawbone in the cellar of the rectory was seen by many as a confirmation of this (see *The Enigma of Borley Rectory* (1996) by Ivan Banks). Price arranged a Christian burial of the fragment at Liston churchyard.

On survival, Price had an antipathy to Spiritualism, exposing a number of fraudulent mediums with relish and explaining more puzzling cases as telekinesis and telepathy. This did not stop Spiritualists proclaiming the posthumous return of his spirit after his own death in 1948. Price seems to have been impressed

by messages received by the American medium Eileen Garrett concerning the R101 Airship disaster near Beauvais in France in 1930 (see *The Airmen Who Would Not Die* (1979) by John G Fuller; *Light*, vol.136, no.1, Spring 2015; *Alpha*, no.6, Jan/Feb 1980). He appears to have been genuinely taken in by a materialisation séance in a private home in London in which a young girl, 'Rosalie', supposedly manifested in 1938 (a mystery which is dissected and plausibly explained by Paul Adams in his excellent *The Enigma of Rosalie: Harry Price's Paranormal Mystery Revisited*, 2017). Near the end of his life, Price became increasingly active at his local church in Pulborough, Sussex, so it appears his private views on the afterlife were conventionally religious. He was buried beneath a simple stone cross in Pulborough churchyard and on Good Friday 2018, I, together with members of the Ghost Club, laid a wreath at his grave to mark the 70th anniversary of his death.

The techniques pioneered by Price were developed and extended by an eager new generation of ghost hunters after World War II, many of whom became sceptical of the traditional spirit hypothesis.

Philip Paul (1922-2010) followed Price's lead at Borley, holding seven unsuccessful vigils on 28 July, the date the nun was said to appear, and then excavating the rectory site in 1955. Paul moonlighted from his ordinary job as a Fleet Street crime correspondent for *Psychic News*, becoming increasingly disillusioned by the fraud he found in Spiritualist circles. In 2002, he told myself and researcher Milton Edwards he felt he had only met one convincing medium, a woman who cured him of a long-standing medical problem and saved his life. On



GHOSTWATCH

survival he became steadily agnostic and doubtful. (See *Some Unseen Power* (1985) by Philip Paul).

Occupying Price's seat at the Ghost Club for many years was Peter Underwood (1923-2014) serving as its President between 1962-1993. Underwood pursued ghosts for decades, penning numerous books on psychic topics, including reincarnation and exorcism. Privately, he was less sure of life after death himself, eventually telling the press in the mid-1990s that he was still not convinced of any form of survival. Writing in 2009 to John Fraser, the author of *Ghost Hunting: A Survivor's Guide*: "I always hoped during one of the ghost hunts I organised and supervised over the last sixty years that irrefutable proof would become evident of something existing after death but I never found anything lasting, perhaps we are not meant to find it... I never encountered anything that proved life after death to my satisfaction. However... I am still hoping." Closing his autobiography, *No Common Task* (1983), he wrote "that to live in the hearts and memories of those we leave behind is not to die".

Tom Perrott (1921-2013), chairman of the Ghost Club for 29 years, expressed similar reservations. He witnessed genuine poltergeist activity at a house in Spencer Grove, Hackney, in 1969, and manifestations at a hotel in Herefordshire, but had not found anything that had convinced him of personal survival. He told me: "In most cases my ghost hunting equipment consists of a note book, a pencil and a sympathetic ear".

Andrew Green (1927-2004) described himself as "a ghost hunter who does not believe in ghosts". Though joking in his *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973) that he would be interested in ghosts "until I became one myself", he ardently rejected survival entirely. A convinced atheist and humanist, he explained hauntings as a mixture of telepathy, psychokinesis and impersonal energies (electromagnetic in nature). He considered talk of spirits of the dead had no place in science. Regularly he reminded me and others that up to 40 per cent of recognised apparitions are of living people. Adopting a more relaxed and tolerant attitude towards mediums than many sceptics, he credited a minority of mediums as enjoying genuine ESP powers, but viewed their messages as products of the unconscious mind, either theirs or their sitters.

A most experienced investigator of mediums and haunted houses from the 1940s through to his death in 2010 was Tony Cornell, Vice President of the SPR and President of the Cambridge University Society for Psychical Research. Together with Dr Alan Gauld, he deployed an automatic monitoring device utilising



ABOVE: Tea with Peter Underwood, who served as the Ghost Club's President for over 30 years.

a thermometer, video camera and sound recorder at over 100 different locations in 20 years to capture evidence at haunting premises with negligible results. Tackling the totality of evidence and refusing to be selective, he concluded that the presence of the living rather than the dead was necessary for hauntings and séance room phenomena. In *Investigating the Paranormal* (2003), he stated: "Evidence for any discarnate responsibility, for these events is far from substantial. It is certainly not enough to be indicative, let alone conclusive". However, from personal conversations we shared at his Cambridge home, I know he did not completely discount survival or consider it falsified. Indeed, one intriguing report has been heard since his death from another psychical researcher that might be suggestive of a post-mortem communication from him.

Yet it would be wrong to assume all ghost hunters of this period held pessimistic views on personal survival following bodily dissolution. American Dr Hans Holzer (included here on account of his book *Great British Ghost Hunt*, 1976), believed ghosts were often spirits of the dead and readily took mediums, psychics and witches on his numerous investigations.

Professor Archie Roy (1924-2013), who investigated a number of haunted houses in Scotland, was convinced of survival by the weight of evidence accumulated by the early psychical researchers and sittings with mediums, rather than his work on spontaneous cases.

Joan Forman, the author of *Haunted East Anglia* (1975) and *Haunted Royal Homes*

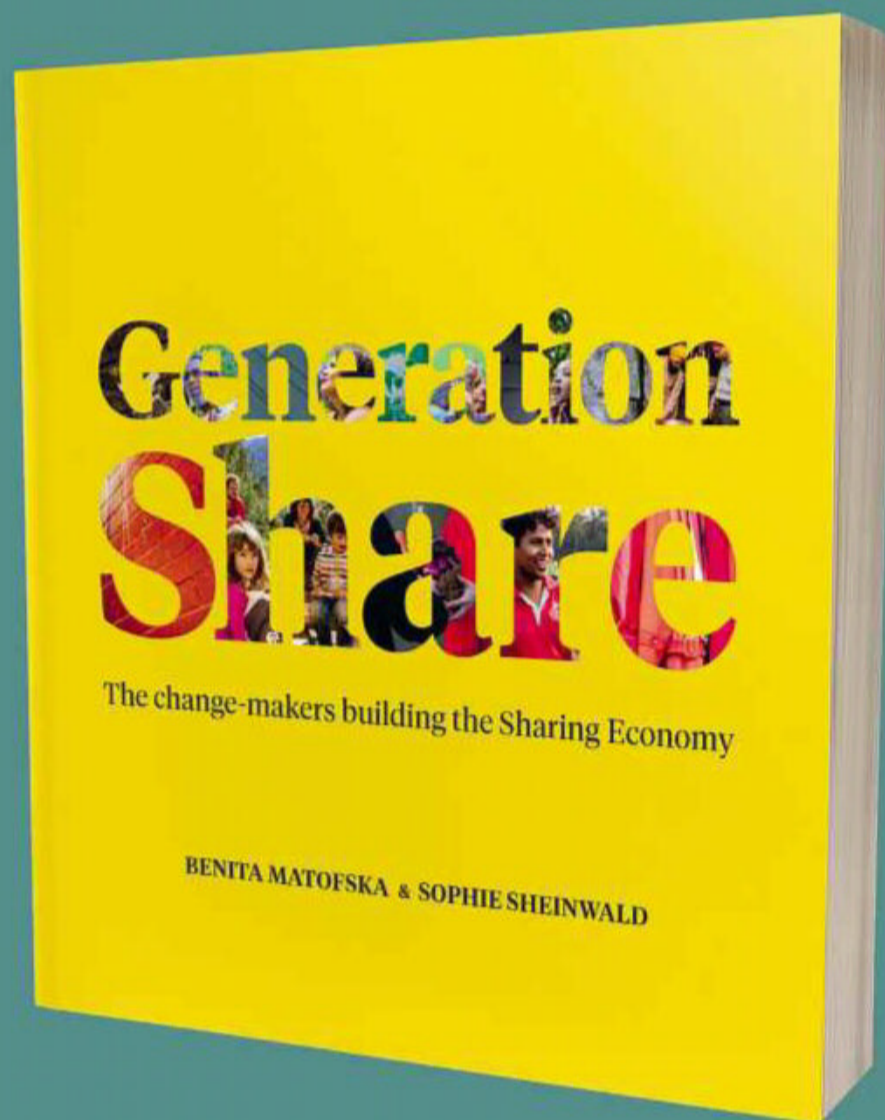
(1987), spent a year travelling around the eastern counties (she cast her net wide, taking in Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire as well as Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex). She ascribed most ghosts to residues of energy imprinted like recordings on the material environment or others as being generated by the living, but conceded there was no all-encompassing explanation and concluded some apparitions were the recently dead. She was impressed by the story of the life-like apparition of a deceased American airman who spoke to a witness at a farm near Bishops Stortford shortly after World War II, being heard to say, "It's kinda cosy here". He had only visited the farm briefly in life, before being killed in a wartime raid, and she considered there had been no time for him to leave an imprint at the property. She later wrote *The Golden Shore: The Survey of Evidence for Death Survival* (1988).

Of all the ghost hunters I have known personally, writer and broadcaster Dennis Bardens (1911-2004), author of *Ghosts and Hauntings* (1965), was the most eloquent and optimistic concerning post-mortem survival. Speaking at a meeting of the Ghost Club at the Wig and Pen Club in November 1999, he compared dying to "moving from one room to another" or a "chrysalis turning into a butterfly". He was convinced by personal experiences and those of many others he had met over a 70-year period as well as that accumulated by psychical researchers from 1882. At his funeral in February 2004, the cheerful song 'Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries' was played as the closing music to remind us.

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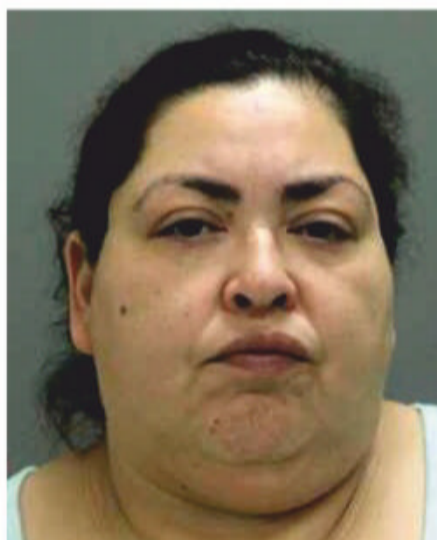
UNTIMELY RIPP'D | Cases of foetal abduction continue to make the headlines, with 10 more horrifying cases reported since 2011...



RAYMOND BOYD / GETTY IMAGES

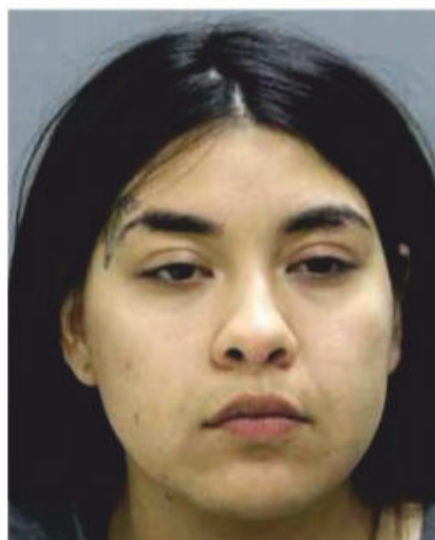
TOP: A mural in the Pilsen neighbourhood of Chicago, Illinois, by artist Milton Coronado. It is dedicated to pregnant 19-year-old Marlen Ochoa-Lopez, who was killed and had her baby cut from her womb. **BELOW LEFT AND CENTRE:** Clarisa Figueroa (left) and her daughter Desiree were responsible. **BELOW RIGHT:** Colorado foetus thief Dynel Lane.

• On 23 April, Marlen Ochoa-Lopez, 19, who had a two-year-old child and was nine months pregnant, responded to a Facebook offer of a free pram and baby clothes. She visited the Chicago home of Clarisa Figueroa, 46, and her daughter Desiree Figueroa, 24, and was led to the basement. While Desiree showed her a photo album, Clarisa sneaked up behind and strangled her with a coaxial cable. Mother and daughter cut the baby from her womb with a butcher's knife. They wrapped the teenager's body in a blanket, put it in a plastic bag and dragged it outside to a rubbish bin. Clarisa called 911, reporting that her newborn baby had stopped breathing. When paramedics arrived, the baby was blue. They tried to resuscitate him and took him to hospital, where he remained on life support for two months until his death from a severe brain injury. After a DNA test established his identity, his



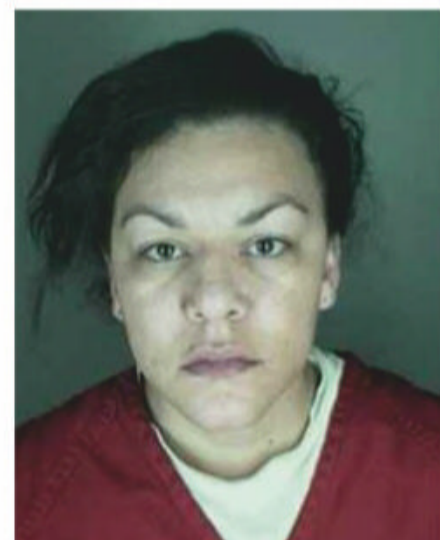
father Yovany named him Yovani Yadiel. The body of his real mother was discovered three weeks after her disappearance.

Clarisa Figueroa wanted to raise another child two years after her adult son Xander died of natural causes. She told her family she was pregnant and plotted for months to acquire a newborn, and call him Xander. She posted online an ultrasound and photos of a room decorated for a baby. In March, she and

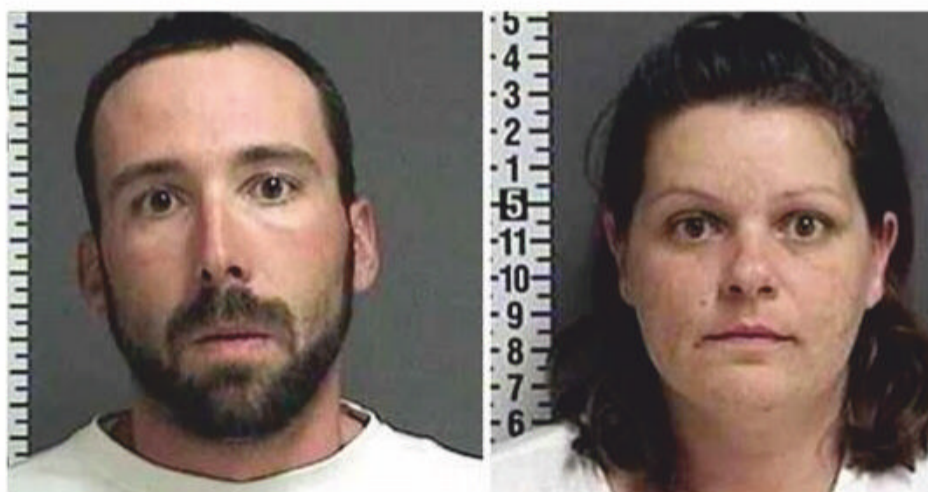


Ms Ochoa-Lopez connected on a Facebook page for pregnant women. The scene was set for the atrocity. Mother and daughter have been charged with murder, while the mother's partner, Piotr Bobak, 40, was charged with concealing a body. *Eve Standard*, 17 May; [AP] 18 May; *Metro*, 24 May; *D.Mirror*, 25 May; [PA] *Irish Examiner*, 14 June 2019.

• Annette Morales-Rodriguez, 33, a mother of three from



Milwaukee, faked a pregnancy before befriending Maritza Ramirez-Cruz, 23, also a mother of three, on 6 October 2011. She lured the pregnant woman to her home, hit her with a baseball bat, choked her into unconsciousness, bound her hands, feet and mouth with duct tape, and cut the full-term foetus from her womb with a box-cutter. Both mother and baby died. Morales-Rodriguez told investigators her boyfriend



ABOVE LEFT: William Hoehn and Brooke Crews were desperate for a child. ABOVE RIGHT: Cinthia Fatima N. BELOW: Mirian Siqueira lied to her husband that she was pregnant.

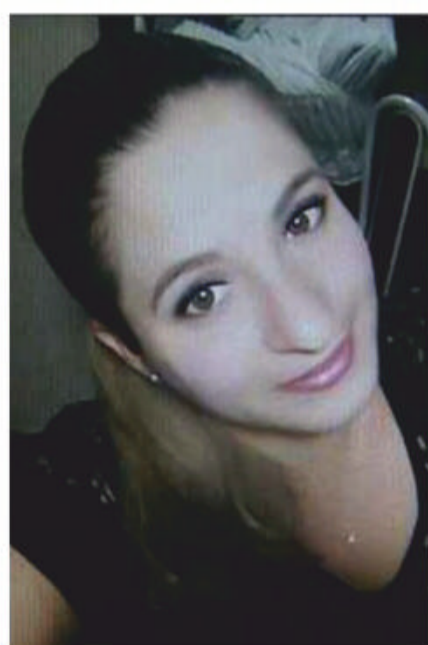
wanted a son, but she couldn't get pregnant. She faced a life sentence. *Irish Independent*, 11 Oct 2011, 17 Sept 2012; (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 12 Oct; *Take It Easy*, 2 Dec 2011.

- Loretta Cooke, 29, of Johannesburg, cut open Valencia Behrens, 34, and stole her foetus. She was arrested when she took the newborn to a health clinic to treat a cut on its head. Behrens died, while her baby survived. *Irish Times*, 21 Jan 2012.

- Daiana dos Santos, 21, of Manaus, northern Brazil, thought she was pregnant, but doctors told her that the bump was actually a myoma. Worried that her husband would leave her when he discovered she wasn't expecting, the hysterical woman lured Odete Barreto, 22, to her house for free baby clothes, hit her over the head with a plank and cut out her baby with a razorblade. Barreto was 37 weeks pregnant. Leaving the mother for dead, Santos took the baby into the street, claiming it was hers. Neighbours ran inside and found Ms Barreto in a pool of blood. She and the baby were taken to hospital and put in intensive care. Both survived. *Metro*, 12 Oct 2012.

- Maria Rodriguez, 29, lured Nadia Avila to her home in Tepic, Mexico, beat her unconscious and cut out her foetus with a kitchen knife. Both mother and child perished. *Sun*, 29 Aug 2014.

- Dynel Catrece Lane, of Longmont, Colorado, lost a 19-month-old child when he



She hit her with a lava lamp, cut her open, and took her baby

drowned in a fishpond. Over 10 years later, Michelle Wilkins, 26 and seven months pregnant, responding to an advertisement on Craigslist for baby clothes on 18 March 2015. She visited Lane's apartment, where Lane hit her with a lava lamp, cut her open, and snatched her baby daughter. Wilkins was able to make an emergency call, but was barely conscious when officers arrived. She was expected to recover. When Lane's husband, David Ridley, returned, she told him she had experienced a miscarriage and he rushed her to hospital, but by then the baby was dead and Lane was arrested. It was unclear whether or not the infant was stillborn. Lane, a "certified nurse aide", had two

children of her own, but had been trying for another. On 29 April 2016, she was sentenced to 100 years in prison. *BBC News*, 19 Mar; *D.Mirror*, 12 Sept 2015.

- Mirian Siqueira, 25, lied to her husband that she was pregnant. She lured Valissia Fernandes de Jesus, 15, to her home in São Paulo, Brazil, with the promise of showing her some baby shoes. Siqueira cut the teenager open to steal her baby, accidentally wounding it in the head. The mother's body was found in a barrel in Siqueira's garden and the lifeless eight-month foetus in a bathtub. *D.Mirror*, 15 Oct; *Sunday Mirror*, 16 Oct 2016.

- Brooke Crews, 36, and her boyfriend, William Hoehn, 32, were desperate for a child, so she pretended to be pregnant. Savanna LaFontaine-Greywing, 22, their neighbour in Fargo, North Dakota, was eight months pregnant. She went missing on 19 August 2017 after visiting the couple upstairs. Eight days later, her body was found by kayakers in Red River, Minnesota, sliced from hip to hip and wrapped in plastic secured with duct tape. Crews and Hoehn, who were caring for a baby girl they claimed was their own, were arrested. The child was given to Greywing's long-term boyfriend, Ashton Matheny, 21, who named her Haisley Jo. Crews admitted knocking Greywing unconscious and cutting out her baby and was sentenced to life in prison without parole. Hoehn also got life, but with the possibility of parole. *BBC News*, 29 Aug; *D.Mail*, 30 Aug 2017; *Sunday*, 9 Dec 2018.

- Joelma Silva, 22, and accomplice Alex Carvalho, 18, lured a pregnant woman to a beauty spot near São Sebastiao da Uatuma in northern Brazil, where they butchered her and stole her baby. The victim was 37 weeks pregnant; the child was unharmed. "I took the knife, but it wasn't me who opened her belly," said Silva. "I took the baby out from inside." *D.Mirror*, 24 Oct 2017.

- Cinthia Fatima N, a mother of three, strangled Jessica Gabriela N, 20, and cut out her unborn baby after failing to tell her husband, Omar Enrique N, that she had suffered a miscarriage. As so often, it was the offer of baby clothes that lured the victim – in Tampico, Mexico – to her death. The authorities were alerted to a link with Cinthia after a woman claiming to be her sister turned up at a hospital with a dead baby, saying her sister had had a still-birth. *Metro*, 3 April 2018.

- There have reportedly been 25 cases of foetal abduction or womb raiding worldwide since 1974, when Winifred Ransom, 36, hacked and shot to death pregnant Margaret Sweeney in Philadelphia. She was acquitted on grounds of insanity. Four mothers and 13 babies have survived the gruesome crime.

Between 1995 and 2011, *Fortean Times* reported 16 such cases, 12 in the US and one each in South Africa, Colombia and Hong Kong [FT144:17, 194:8, 247:26, 252:17, 255:27, 279:23]. Why the US leads the field is a mystery.



MYSTERY MEN | One masked miscreant terrorises Somerset, another impersonates a French defence minister, and Russia's 'living mummy' remains an enigma



ABOVE: The terrifying Somerset 'Gimp Man', as photographed by Abi Conroy as he came towards her, "touching his groin" and "grunting". **BELOW:** Who is 'Alexander' – the emaciated inhabitant of a bear's larder, a 'living mummy' or a psoriasis sufferer?

SOMERSET'S GIMP MAN

Around 11.30pm on 11 July, Abi Conroy, 23, was walking in Claverham, Somerset. She had her camera app open after spotting something on the side of the street. "I was walking along with my torch and looked up to see someone charging at me in a full black rubbery suit and managed to take a picture," she said. "He kept coming towards me and was touching his groin, grunting and breathing heavy. As I tried to take a step back he was right in front of my face and he put his leg forward." He had red crosses over his eyes and a zig-zag mouth. Ms Conroy pushed him and screamed before he ran away and disappeared through a hedge. "I don't want to go out," she said afterwards. "It's not just a man jumping out at me going 'Boo!' Every time I close my eyes I just see that face." Police used a helicopter and sniffer dog in an unsuccessful search for the man. A fortnight earlier, the same man is believed to have chased a young man in the neighbouring village of Yatton. Since last November, the mystery offender



had targeted at least 14 men and women while dressed in a range of disguises, including a killer clown outfit, sending a ripple of fear through Claverham, which has a population of just 2,000. Some residents said he had "engaged in inappropriate behaviour with animals", or had appeared outside their houses, suggestively rubbing himself on grass or breathing on their windows. The first encounters were four years ago, but have escalated in recent months. The police made two arrests, but then let out the suspects on bail pending investigation. *BBC News*, 14 July; *D.Telegraph*, 16 July' *D.Mail*, 16+17+20 July 2019.

SAVED FROM BEAR'S LARDER?

Mauled and emaciated, this man reportedly survived a month in a bear's den. A brown bear was thought to have broken his spine and hidden him in its 'larder'. The man, named only as Alexander, said he drank his own urine to stay alive as he lay at the predator's mercy. He was close to death when hunters found him in a remote Siberian forest after their dogs barked at the den and refused to move on. At first sight, hunters thought he was a corpse. "The bear preserved me as food for later," he told them. Footage shows him gaunt and covered with blood and sores in a hospital bed. He could only remember his first name but not his age. He was said to be suffering "severe injuries and rotting tissue" from lying motionless for so long in the den.

Local reports said he was found in mountainous Tuva in southern Siberia, but an official spokesman said: "We cannot confirm the case happened in Tuva. It was not registered by the Ministry of Health, the Emergency Ministry or any other official body [in Tuva]." The video of the man in hospital had emerged on Russian news website *EAD Daily* on 25 June, and had over 300,000 views. In the UK, the story was picked up by the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*



LONG-LOST SISTER NEXT DOOR

Hillary Harris always knew she was adopted, but started actively searching for her parents after the birth of her daughter Stella. She was sad to learn that her biological father, Wayne Clouse, had died in 2010. However, the 31-year-old, from Eau Claire in Wisconsin, discovered from her father's obituary that she had a half-sister named Dawn Johnson from Greenwood, also in Wisconsin. In 2017 new neighbours moved in. "My husband said her name was Dawn and she was from Greenwood," said Mrs Harris. "We began joking about the fact that she could be my sister, but what were the chances?"

Despite sharing a driveway, the pair rarely spoke, but eight months later, in August 2017, Mrs Harris's "stomach dropped" when she saw a package addressed to "Dawn Johnson". She texted her neighbour to ask: "Who was your father?" and when the reply was "Wayne Clouse", she hugged her new-found sister on the drive. Ms Johnson, 50, was ecstatic. She said: "It's truly unbelievable to buy a house and find that my sister, who I didn't even know existed, was living next door." At the time of the news report a year later, the sisters had become inseparable. *Washington Post*, 30 June; *Metro*, 9 Aug 2018.

and *Sun*, citing "local media" as the source.

In fact, the "living mummy" video had gone viral before. On 19 June, a story came to light in the Black Sea resort of Sochi. The hero of this tale was also called "Alexander", and he too had survived against all the odds, having allegedly been buried alive, only to escape after a local cemetery was flooded by heavy rains. Officials in Sochi said the story was fake; while others claimed the footage showed the victim of a drug known as Krokodil. Then a hospital in Kazakhstan said the man had been a patient at their facility. The language in the background spoken by a nurse is not the local language of Tuva, but Kazakh. Rustem Isaev, the head doctor at Aktobe Medical Centre, confirmed that a patient called Alexander P, 41, was brought to the hospital in a serious condition on 8 June. He was treated for problems including a wound to his right side, sepsis and psoriasis, which he had failed to treat. The

patient and his mother agreed to the filming of his condition for medical training purposes. *independent.co.uk*, *D.Mirror*, 27 June; *observers.france24.com*, 2 July 2019.

FRENCH MINISTER IMPERSONATION

One of the odder and more ingenious scams to be perpetrated in recent years was the work of Gilbert Chikli. This 52-year-old dual Israeli-French citizen obtained a silicone mask to impersonate French defence minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, then sat at a desk in a mocked-up ministerial office, complete with French flag and a portrait of then President Francois Hollande. Chikli then made video calls to some of the world's wealthiest people, pretending to represent the French state on a top-secret mission. He managed to rake in £45 million by saying his government needed huge donations to secure the release of hostages kidnapped by Daesh. He promised donors would be

flown to the Elysée Palace and awarded the Légion d'honneur.

Around 150 people were targeted from the summer of 2015; some eight million euros was taken from the Aga Khan alone. Chikli is said to have drunk five cups of coffee and two whiskies before

every 'performance' to get his impersonation of M Le Drian's voice right. He was arrested in Ukraine in August 2017 and is now in jail near Paris awaiting trial, but most of the money has been laundered and will never be recovered. *D.Mail*, 21 June 2019.



ABOVE: The masked scamster George Chikli impersonates French defence minister Jean-Yves Le Drian; the real minister is shown in the inset photo.

CONFERENCE REPORT

MEGALITHOMANIA 2019

ROB IRVING arrives in Glastonbury to explore the fringes of archæology

What have megaliths to do with a Journal of Strange Phenomena? The rationalist might say ‘not much’. A more insightful truth lies in myth and contemporary legend. Prehistory, by definition, as far as human culture goes, is a blank slate – an invitation to imagine through the divination of remains what on Earth the ancients were up to. But the question goes further. One of the great myths says that our ancient ancestors were key-holders to a ‘lost’ wisdom, pockets of knowledge lost in the folds in the rush to Enlightenment. Hence the relationship of ancient and ‘New Age’ – lost wisdom translates to new science. This is thought to manifest – as *phenomena* – mostly around special or ‘sacred’ places, places of power, so many of which are marked by stone circles and other megalithic monuments.

A way of drawing out these insights, if that’s what they are, is through phenomenology, sensations gained from our own bodily experience of place. One end of this spectrum is to treat place as a perceptual space performed with the eyes and feet, what archæologist Miles Russell described as a nice long walk with your eyes open. In the last two decades this has become an accepted approach within academic archæology. The spirit of place is always fluid and susceptible to lived experience, at which point place and space become fused. At the other end is speculative fiction, or, let’s say, *radical future imaginaries*, which the rationalist might call ‘bollocks’. Here there be giants, long-skulled princesses, aliens, leys...

Megalithomania, held lately at Glastonbury Town Hall, successfully captures all the

colours and subtle overlapping nuances of this spectrum.

Until now I’d managed to avoid this event; I’d heard enough New Age counterfactuals at crop circle gatherings to last a lifetime, and with the same faces involved I didn’t think it would be any different. As croppie Michael Glickman stated at the first Megalithomania conference in May 2006, if not a love story there is at least a flirtation between stone circles and crop circles. Thankfully, my anxieties were relieved by the opening speaker, Anthony Murphy, who delivered an educated and engaging account of his travels around the Boyne Valley, home to the grand Newgrange passage tomb, part of an emerging complex of Neolithic sites in the Brú na Bóinne landscape. It was Murphy who recorded, last summer, crop marks of what has become known as ‘dronehenge’, which in turn led

to the discovery of other latent marvels nearby.

Outside at the break, a man stopped me to talk about the Great Pyramid. He told me his name but that he prefers to go by Crazy Rainbow. He had found new info about how the monument was built and wanted to tell others from the podium, but the organiser refused to see him to talk about this. So he’d give an impromptu lecture on the steps at lunchtime, he said; it would be Megalithomania’s first fringe event. I liked that. Later, as I left for lunch I heard him berating people for not listening, for our blindness to his discoveries.

A pyramidiot, our rationalist might have called him. But not me, for I too have grown out of that indoctrinated rage for explanation. Explanationism, John Michell called it. Perhaps it was crop circles that taught us, in their roundabout way, that confronted by the mystery

of creation a productive route to learning is to view material in terms of art criticism, which may be understood as the imaginative re-experiencing of creation or perception on the part of the creators. This avoids the problems created by determinate evaluation, not least within archæology, which, after all, is the sister of anthropology.

A good example of this was Andy Burnham’s reading of a passage from *The Old Stones*, which he edited, written by archæologist Vicki Cummings about the mystery of dolmens. Dr Cummings sensibly takes issue with received wisdom that describes dolmens as tombs – or ‘burial chambers’, as the brown signs say. They may well have been used to house the dead at some point but, she argues, it makes more sense that they were conceived to demonstrate tribal prowess at raising and supporting massive stones so that they may be seen, and thus intended to elicit wonder in those gathered (such a feat would have required gatherings). A risk, of course, was collapse, and there is evidence of such failures, left in situ – abandoned; strange for a stone box, if that



ABOVE: Megalithomania 2019, founders and speakers gather at Glastonbury: (left-right) Gareth Mills, Anthony Murphy, Jürgen Krönig, Steve Marshall, Christine Rhone, Hugh Newman, Andy Burnham, John Martineau.



PHOTOS: ROB IRVING

ABOVE LEFT: Crazy Rainbow, operating at the fringes of the fringe. ABOVE RIGHT: Pentre Ifan, Pembrokeshire – an early example of art for art's sake?

was the intention. What we are really considering here is something akin to the original meaning of *aesthetics* – a more visceral, numinous experience of art than the cerebral 18th century German interpretation.

The first day was rounded off by two key speakers. Paul Devereux gave an overview of his research into *archaeoacoustics*, including his discovery of the 110 Hz effect in chambered Neolithic monuments. This and his earlier work with *entoptic* imagery and a 'prehistory of psychedelia' (also *earthlights* and *straight-line* mysteries) are no longer considered part of a radical fringe. He was followed by archaeologist Julian Richards with an informative talk about ancient DNA and isotopic analysis, and the inherent problems in answering the question: who built Stonehenge?

The second day began with our host, Hugh Newman, talking about the trips he's made around Central America, Egypt, and Europe, looking at ancient polygonal and cyclopean walls, and their mythical association with giants or gods. These are impressive constructions, and their spread across cultures is surprising – but rather than pointing to a single source,

might this not instead suggest the techniques involved were common practice, all within the bounds of human ken? I keep hearing that no mortar was used, but is this necessary with megaliths? It wasn't used at Stonehenge either. Nor is there much need for exotic technology, which we were assured "has been documented in the Old Testament and elsewhere".

My old friend Jürgen Krönig followed with a talk on the same subject, but by now I'd realised that there were too many interesting talks to catch them all, and I slipped out to see what Crazy Rainbow was up to.

The John Michell Memorial Lecture, titled *Number, Reality and the Prehistoric Origins of Measure*, was given by Adam Tetlow. Like John Martineau before him, Adam is a Master's graduate of the Prince's School of Traditional Arts, where he teaches on aspects of geometry, number, and harmonics. Interestingly, he launched into talking about Trickster figures – a warning hidden in plain sight. The first trap I almost stepped in was a reference to the importance of precision in measure. Blondlot's n-rays came to mind, measurable to the ultimate nth degree of nothing. Mathematics is

amazing – not least as an esoteric art form – but to assert that "the Earth was surveyed 8,000 years ago" on the basis of numerical relationships found in the stone rows at Carnac is a bit rich. Suddenly I was transported back to late 1991, to the Assembly Rooms around the corner, listening to the man himself talking at a Cornference about ratios between the Earth's circumference, and the Moon's, and the Hermetic Barbary Castle *agriglyph*. But no one can criticise *this* angle for its inelegance. With John Michell's contributions to creative culture, and that of his followers, it is sometimes tricky to determine fact from the counterfactual conditions that act upon people as (and are often indistinguishable from) facts, and are marshalled to give intellectual strength to an alternative position. This level of grass roots legend is admirable stuff, and it works as art on so many levels, not least that of pure reverie. Better than having to conform to an orthodoxy which would exclude or reject alternative approaches.

My weekend was complete with Steve Marshall talking about his *Avebury Soundscapes* album, the addendum to his book *Exploring Avebury: The*

Essential Guide. So thorough was his research for the book that it would not all fit in, so he created a website (<http://exploringavebury.com>), which is an excellent resource. But even this doesn't touch on an important side to Avebury that is often overlooked by archaeologists: the atmospheric, mystical qualities of ritual landscapes. This isn't something Marshall finds easy to write about – so while music seems an odd leap, it's his indigenous terrain and comes more naturally as a way of expressing this sensorial experience. And, entertaining as the music is, what is most interesting about it is how it puts across archaeological ideas in a different way, as if looked at peripherally, capturing the essence of 'imaginative re-experiencing of creation or perception on the part of the creators' that I referred to earlier.

Having already reviewed *Avebury Soundscapes* (FT361:60-61), I won't go into detail about how Marshall's music opens valuable insights into interpreting Neolithic sites; suffice to say the same applies to much of the leftfield material at Megalithomania. It was yet another welcome reminder to remain sceptical of my own scepticism.



A chain of unfortunate events

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

ROSWELL: THE PURRLGURRL THEORY

Amazing. Someone has said something sensible about 'Roswell'. About a year ago, Kevin Randle thoughtfully and honestly expressed some doubts as to the likelihood that 'Roswell' involved anything extraterrestrial (<https://kevinrandle.blogspot.com/2018/08/the-decline-of-roswell.html>), to which a poster called 'purrlgurrl' responded:

"At this point, what happened at Roswell seems to me to have been a chain of unfortunate events. My following proposed scenario, while having no evidence to support it, is based on a lifetime of observation of human behaviour in groups across a wide variety of organisations, private and public. What the hell. This 'explanation' is as valid as any other unproven Roswell claims. So here it goes:

"I believe that nothing at all happened in July 1947 but a series of screw-ups beginning with [William 'Mac'] Brazel finding some bits of debris that were unusual to him (but actually mundane) that also were not immediately recognised by whomever he originally gave them to at the base.

"Eager to receive the credit and glory for being the group that conclusively identified whatever was being seen in the skies in 1947 led those given the debris to jump to a hugely erroneous conclusion about what Brazel had brought in.

"This eagerness to be proclaimed the heroes who solved the mystery in the skies led to a premature public announcement. When everyone caught their breath and realised (or were informed) what they had was nothing out of the ordinary and didn't prove the sensational claim just made to the public, a retraction had to be quickly issued. The episode then faded from the public consciousness and was forgotten.

"Years later, whenever [Major Jesse] Marcel was asked about what happened, not wanting to look foolish in retrospect, his natural human inclination was to deny an error was made and defend the initial misidentification of the debris. After all, who would want to be seen as an incompetent, especially when you were the base intelligence officer and should have known what the debris really was or at least exercised the necessary caution and due diligence to keep an embarrassing internal snafu from being widely publicised? And besides, Roswell by then was an obscure event known only to a tiny handful of fringe geeks, so what was the harm in telling a self-serving fib to some random guy whose hobby was UFOs?



ABOVE: Will the Little A'Le'inn in Rachel, New Mexico, be able to cope with two million visitors?

"However, as it turned out Stanton Friedman was one of those 'harmless' UFO guys Marcel regaled with his story. Friedman was a UFO nerd who also needed a secondary career after the one he had as a nuclear physicist was beginning to dry up because his credentials were no longer adequate (no doctorate). So, he latched onto Marcel's self-exculpation version of events as a possible new supplementary meal ticket and ran like hell with it. Well, it eventually reached popular CNN tabloid entertainment anchor, Larry King, who brought Friedman and this long-forgotten crashed flying saucer tale to a wide audience.

"As a result, it began heavily raining down mostly incompetent UFO 'researchers', biased ETH advocates, and outright con men on Roswell, its residents, and Marcel in particular. And as they say, the rest is history."

That works for me.

ROCK THE ALIENS

There have now been over two million RSVPs in response to student Matty Roberts's jokey suggestion that folks foregather in Nevada to "Storm Area 51" and "see them aliens". This was never a risk-free enterprise, which Roberts acknowledged in a TV interview: "I mean, shit, man, Area 51, it's the military. There's no fucking around. I hope nobody gets hurt. I've read about Area 51 and that's a serious place, what with the tunnels leading to Colorado and Washington and everything." Er, well, yes, even without those mythical tunnels, actually. Residents of Rachel, the nearest settlement to Area 51 (pop. 54, and home to the Little A'Le'Inn)

have not been amused, and Lincoln County has 'pre-signed' a declaration of a state of emergency. Roberts, observing that there would be rather a lot of people in the district with not a lot to do, has announced that he's now organising an electronic dance music (groan) festival in Rachel, named, you guessed, 'Alienstock'. Wags have suggested that featured bands should include UFO, Alien Ant Farm, Foo Fighters and, of course, Tom DeLonge's Blink-182. One can't help wondering if this festival idea didn't occur to Roberts *before* he invited people – rather more than anticipated? – to a neighbourhood that isn't his, or if it's a desperate attempt to palliate the situation. Let's hope Nanny's wrong and it doesn't all end in tears.

SPEAKING OF THE DEVIL...

Tom DeLonge ought to be embarrassed, but probably isn't, by the kerfuffle around Luis Elizondo, his actual role in the Department of Defense, and how much truth he told in getting those notorious 'UFO' videos released (see blogs by Jack Brewer (The UFO Trail), Curt Collins (Blue Blurry Lines), and Mick West (Metabunk), among others). DeLonge's mind has been on higher things, for on 18 August he tweeted: "What if there was a genetically advanced race (looks like us) but smarter and way more evolved... what if they have been here since the Ancient Greek, Lemuria and Atlantis times? Would they be telepathic? Would they be the root of historical accounts of Angels and Greek Gods? I guess I'd call them 'Ultra-Terrestrials' and stop calling them 'alien'..." Atlantis? Lemuria? Plato must be spinning in his crypt. Bet Madame Blavatsky's pleased though...



A Norse saga

JENNY RANGLES tries to identify what FT correspondent the late Nils Grande saw back in 1962

I was sent a poignant message this summer via the FT office. It came from a man who was gravely ill but had a lifelong mystery that he wanted to solve. I wish that I had been able to answer Nils Grande's questions, but sadly I could only have a brief exchange with him before his death (**FT383:2**). Described by Nils as "my only honest-to-God UFO experience", it occurred probably in September 1962, during his first year at school, aged about eight (children then started school late). He grew up in the small region of Lom in central Norway. It is a narrow mountainous valley and although south of the Arctic circle, sunlight does not penetrate this deep between November and February. This unusual topography helps us to narrow dates down.

Lom is quite used to seeing aircraft pass over – including jetliners, which from 1952 travelled from Europe to North America. The prevalence of air traffic here in relatively early days of commercial aviation was down to the curvature of the Earth, as flying on such a northern path shortens the distance.

On this fine sunny day Nils was off school – as at that time eight-year-olds only attended three days a week. He was walking the valley some time between 9am and 3pm – established by the fact he ran to school to report what he witnessed to the headmistress. As he walked, he had noticed two very unusual 'contrails'. They did not change form or appear translucent, but kept a solid shape throughout as they moved across the sky heading north-west. He believed that the two large cylindrical shapes appeared solid and watched for about 30 seconds before they went out of view. They did not fade or dissipate, just vanished beyond the mountains.

For a long time he considered they might be a U2 spy plane that flew at twice normal air traffic height and had a very unusual appearance. However, later he spent much time watching aircraft contrails, which confirmed his belief that what he saw was no such thing. These objects were too solid, did not alter shape, had a different gradient of illumination and no point indicating emission from an engine. So what were they?

Lom has a famous church dating back to 1158 with carvings of dragons. It is celebrated as a gateway to one of the highest mountain areas of northern Europe – a national park with the biggest peaks in the country at over 2,400m (7,870ft). Lom means meadow in old Norse. Just over 2,900 people lived there in 1962 (about 20 per cent fewer today). It is about



250km (155 miles) north-north-west of Oslo. During World War II, it was bombed by the Luftwaffe and used as a prisoner-of-war camp. Its main habitation centre is on a long fjord that stretches through the valley. The valley lies 150km (90 miles) south-west of a famous UFO window area – Hessdalen, where unusual lights have long been investigated, with much evidence recorded on sophisticated scientific equipment (**FT103:26-31**). They appear to be some kind of geophysical UAP – a rare atmospheric phenomenon.

Nils's sighting could be a most unusual vapour trail (possibly experimental jet aircraft on test) with rare high atmospheric conditions, or, of course, the Hessdalen light phenomenon. This option seems less likely as two elongated UAP in steady flight would be uncommon. A third option is hinted at by something that occurred just before dawn on 9 December 2009. Even though thousands witnessed the event from around northern Norway and film and video were taken, some still suspect it was a UFO. A greenish/blue cylinder rose from the south-east and headed north-westwards. As it climbed, it turned into an extraordinary catherine wheel-like phenomenon – almost akin to an animated version of the Andromeda spiral galaxy. Videos (like the one above) show how this remarkable spectacle suddenly got swallowed up into what resembled a 'black hole' that formed in the centre.

Early speculation concerned a rare form of polar region auroral activity caused by atmospheric ionisation, but scientists soon rejected that. It also resembled a Barium Cloud experiment – where a rocket fires gas into the upper atmosphere from a submarine and a resulting bright cloud disperses high above the ocean, revealing data on atmospheric science. Several such rocket-fired clouds have triggered UFO sightings over the Canary Islands. Something could have gone amiss with such a test, but as it turned out, Russian scientists later confessed that the 2009 display was indeed an accidental consequence of a rocket

launch, but not a barium cloud test. A Bulava ballistic missile launch from a submarine in the White Sea off the coast of Norway had gone out of control.

These missiles have a 7,000km (4,350 mile) range and can carry nuclear warheads, but this one malfunctioned on its flightpath into the upper atmosphere. So the amazing display was caused by the spiralling rocket climbing like a corkscrew and the rising sun at that height catching the fuel spewing out from it before it was eventually destroyed – resulting in the 'black hole'. Given the location and the flight path in the 2009 incident, it is not inconceivable that Nils's sighting involved a more primitive Russian test missile. So I suggested the possibility to him – although two such missiles moving in tandem seems rather improbable.

Nonetheless, ghost rockets were reported as far back as 1946 over Scandinavia (**FT164:43, 383:33**) – though many were undoubtedly misperceptions of meteors in the dark skies. Others are suspected as being Soviet tests using Nazi V weapons that had targeted London in 1944 (see p55). Indeed, the huge range of these 'flying bombs' is proven by how one demolished two houses in Adswold, Stockport, close to my current home, 300km (186 miles) north of London. Russian troops captured the V rocket base at Peenemünde where rockets were constructed a few weeks after the one that hit Adswold. Most captured V rockets were taken to the US after the war along with Werner von Braun who developed them, but some were by then missing, likely in Soviet hands, as remained the base itself.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, von Braun created the US space programme from this technology and the USSR used it to design ballistic missiles. Their experiments were secret, but by 1955 they had a rocket that could travel hundreds of miles and by 1962 certainly could have launched one over Norway. Indeed, they had raced ahead of the Americans in other ways: they put a dog in space by 1957, and Yuri Gagarin became the first man into Earth orbit in 1961. Ballistic missile tests and early space launches from other bases flew in 1962 so it has to be a consideration. Unfortunately, without a date to cross check and given the secrecy of this history, it is hard to judge this other possibility in the same way as the others.

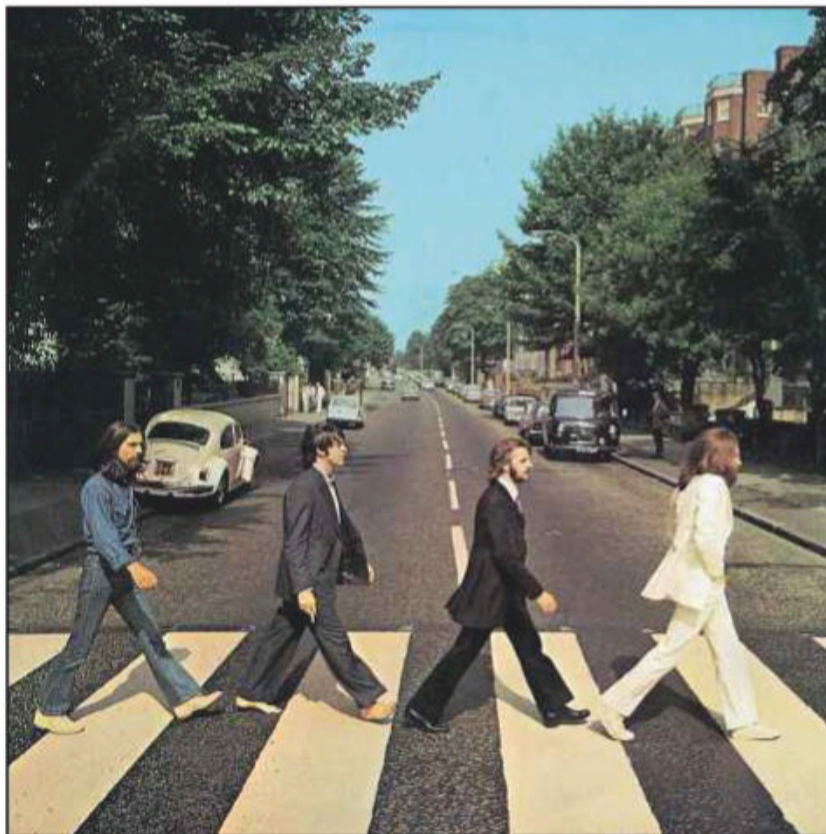
So there are several theories but no definite answers as to what Nils saw that day in 1962. Unless, of course, one of you reading this has a bright idea or can point us in search of further evidence.

LOOKING THROUGH THE BEATLES AND POP MUSIC

With the release of *Abbey Road* in September 1969, rumours that Paul McCartney had died and been replaced with a double started to spread around the world. **DEAN BALLINGER** follows the long and winding road of pop conspiracy theory back to its source.

On 26 September 1969, the Beatles released what would turn out to be their final album, *Abbey Road* (1970's *Let It Be* was technically a posthumous collection of prior recordings). The album coincided with the revival on American college campuses of a 1967 fan rumour that Paul McCartney had been killed in a traffic accident in late 1966 and the remaining Beatles had conspired to cover up this event by replacing McCartney with a double, a deceit that was secretly alluded to through coded references in the artwork and lyrics of the band's post 1966 output.

The initial rumour was a garbled version of the real-life tragedy that befell Tara Browne, a scion of the Guinness brewing dynasty and member of the Beatles' 'Swinging London' social set, which inspired the opening verse of 'A Day In The Life' on Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band ("he blew his mind out in a car"). Its reappearance two years later would probably have remained a fairly low-key strand of Beatles folklore were it not for *Abbey Road*'s iconic cover photo of the fab four walking across the pedestrian crossing outside the EMI recording studios on the titular London street. To those students in the know, this image vindicated the rumour, in that it depicted a symbolic funeral procession for the late bass player. John Lennon, at the head of the procession, represented the Church in his natty white suit, followed by the black-clad undertaker in the form of Ringo Starr: George Harrison, bringing up the rear in workman's denim, was the gravedigger. McCartney's deceased status was signified by clues such as his bare feet (many cultures apparently bury their dead unshod), the fact that he is out of step with his bandmates, and, famously,



LEFT: The cover of *Abbey Road*, released in September 1969, gave new life to the urban legend that Paul McCartney had died in a traffic accident three years earlier and had been replaced with a double.

Paul McCartney had died in 1966 and been replaced with a double

the licence plate on the white Volkswagen parked in the background that read '28IF' – a reference to the fact that Paul would have been 28 years old at the time of *Abbey Road*'s release if he hadn't been killed (McCartney would have actually been 27; but Hindu spirituality – in which the Beatles dabbled in the form of the Transcendental Meditation movement – argued that

newborns were effectively one year old at birth).

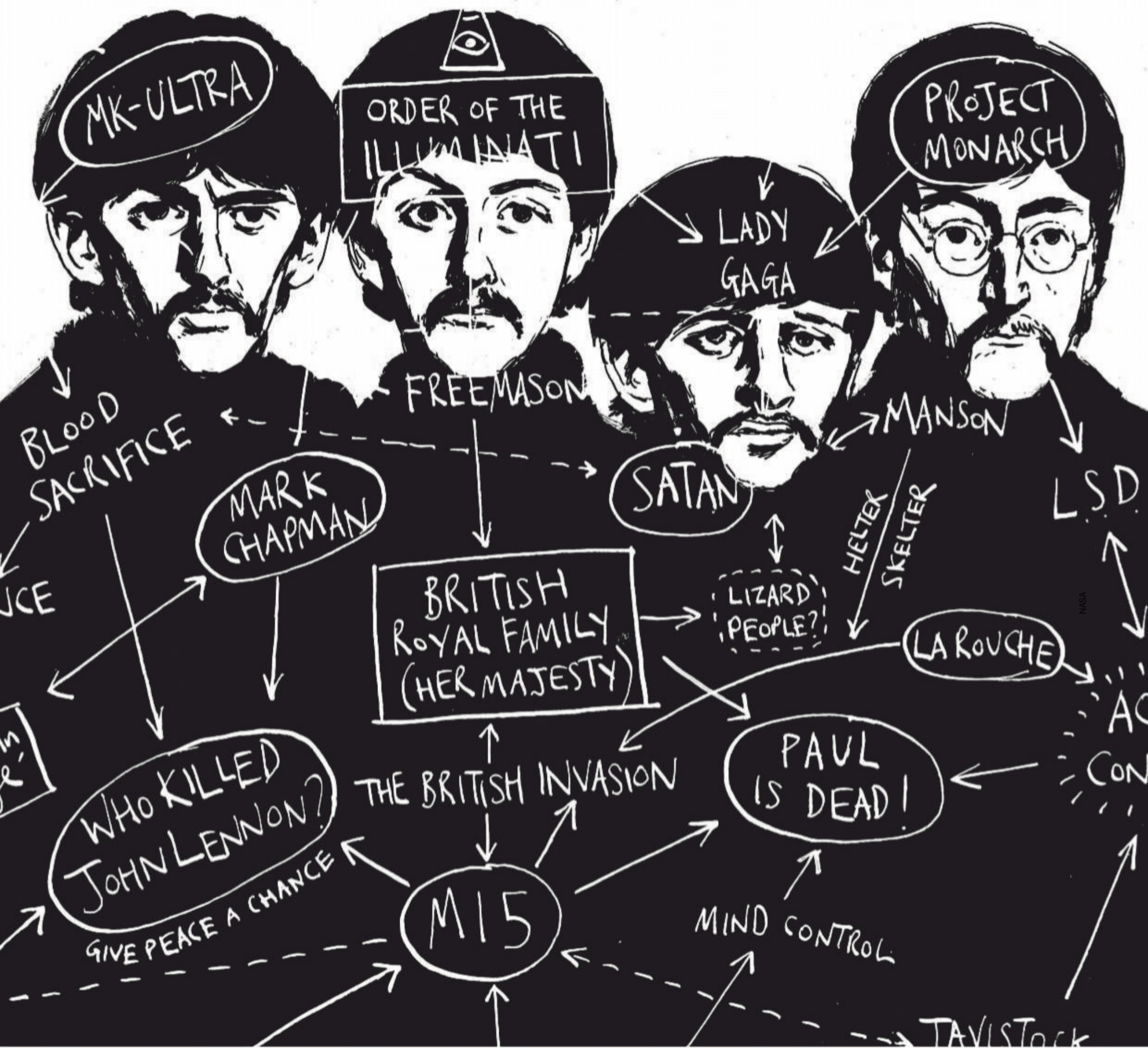
Catalysed by the album's release, the rumour went 'viral' in October 1969, spreading from American campus newspapers and regional radio stations to mainstream national and international media outlets. A key factor in the spread of the story was the sensational claims made about hidden clues to McCartney's death scattered throughout the Beatles oeuvre, such as Lennon backmasking the phrase "Turn me on, dead man" in 'Revolution 9'. Most of these clues

originated from a satirical article penned by Michigan student journalist Fred La Bour in response to a talk radio show he'd heard on the subject, making the story a significant piece of contemporary 'fake news'. In response, McCartney undertook a series of interviews to reaffirm his existence, notably a cover story in a November issue of *Life* magazine entitled 'Paul is still with us'. Although this press coverage officially quashed the rumour, the story proved impossible to eradicate from the thickets of pop culture folklore: a quick Internet search for 'Paul is dead' will bring up results for numerous websites and YouTube videos still peddling proof of the theory (including many hilarious analyses of the physiognomic differences distinguishing the fake McCartney from the real one).

The 'Paul is Dead' rumour was arguably the first significant example of a particular

WITH A GLASS ONION

SIC CONSPIRACY THEORIES



type of conspiracy theory, often labelled the ‘celebrity death hoax’, that has since become entrenched within the wider culture of pop music. The standard version of this theory is that prominent musicians have conspired (either solo or with the help of bandmates, family members and associates) to fake their own deaths, so as to lead lives free from the onerous trappings of rockstar fame.

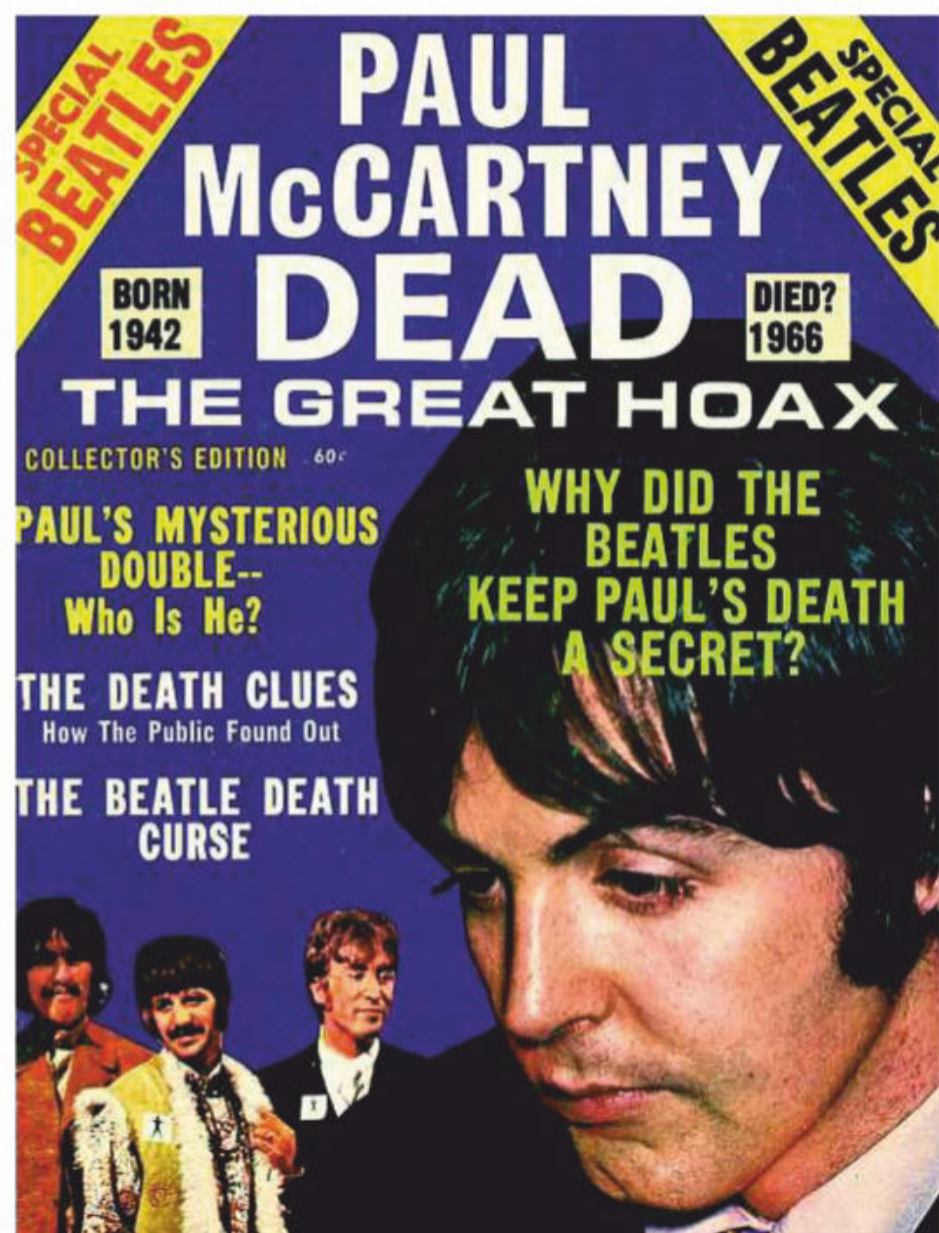
The first major post-Beatles manifestation of this narrative developed around The Doors singer Jim Morrison, who expired in 1971 from drug-induced heart failure while having a bath. Morrison was a prime candidate for such speculation due to the romantic circumstances and legal ambiguities surrounding his demise: at the time of death he was living in self-imposed Bohemian exile in Paris, and no formal autopsy was carried out before his body was quickly interred in Père Lachaise cemetery. However, for the general public the notion of a ‘celebrity death hoax’ is synonymous with the passing of Elvis Presley in 1977, which spawned perennial tabloid speculation and an ongoing cottage industry of ‘Elvis is alive’ theorists (see FT166:42-47, 299:34-38), along with inspiring cult media such as Don Coscarelli’s great 2002 film *Bubba Ho-Tep*, starring Bruce Campbell as the elderly King fighting an Egyptian mummy terrorising a retirement home (see FT195:62).

Of the many subsequent artists who have also been rumoured to have faked their own deaths in the decades since, some of the more prominent include Manic Street Preachers guitarist Richey Edwards in 1995 (a presumed suicide, but no body has ever been found); rapper Tupac Shakur in 1996 (victim of a drive-by shooting); and ‘king of pop’ Michael Jackson in 2009 (prescription drug overdose; see FT258:40-43).

While the ‘Paul is Dead’ mythology is largely treated as a quirky piece of Beatles trivia, it represents an overlooked yet significant aspect of the Beatles’ innumerable contributions to modern popular culture. Along with their myriad achievements and influence in fields such as songwriting, studio recording, album covers, music videos, and fashion, the Beatles were also the unsung pioneers of pop music conspiracy theories. Their career spawned various lines of recondite cultural speculation and interpretation that have subsequently served as templates for the three major types of conspiracy theory that are today associated with popular music. Along with the ‘celebrity death hoax’ theories, the other types include claims that popular music is a form of conspiratorial mind control, and that the premature deaths of leading musicians were conspiratorial assassinations.

BACK IN THE USSR

Ideological concerns about the insidious cultural influence of popular music have percolated through Western societies during the 20th century. For example, the Nazis infamously banned jazz and swing music because they were associated with ‘racially inferior’ African-Americans; while influential Frankfurt School philosopher (and trained avant-garde musician) Theodor Adorno spent a significant portion of his career critiquing the popular music associated with the burgeoning consumer societies of the West as manifestations of the capitalist ‘culture industries’. The birth of rock and roll in 1950s America, concomitant with the rise of the teenager as a distinct demographic group, was similarly marked by conservative moral panics that such music caused juvenile delinquency and promiscuity. However, it appears to be in relation to the success of the Beatles in the early 1960s, at one of the peaks of the Cold War, that such concerns were explicitly articulated in the form of conspiracy theories originating with the American fundamentalist right. These argued that the Beatles were, essentially, a Communist plot designed to influence American youth to rebel against the core values of American society – capitalism, Christianity, and individual liberty.



ABOVE: The ‘Paul is Dead’ rumour became sufficiently widespread to appear on the covers of magazines – and to warrant a rebuttal in the pages of *LIFE* magazine, which ran a photo story revealing that McCartney was alive and well and living in Scotland with Linda and their children.

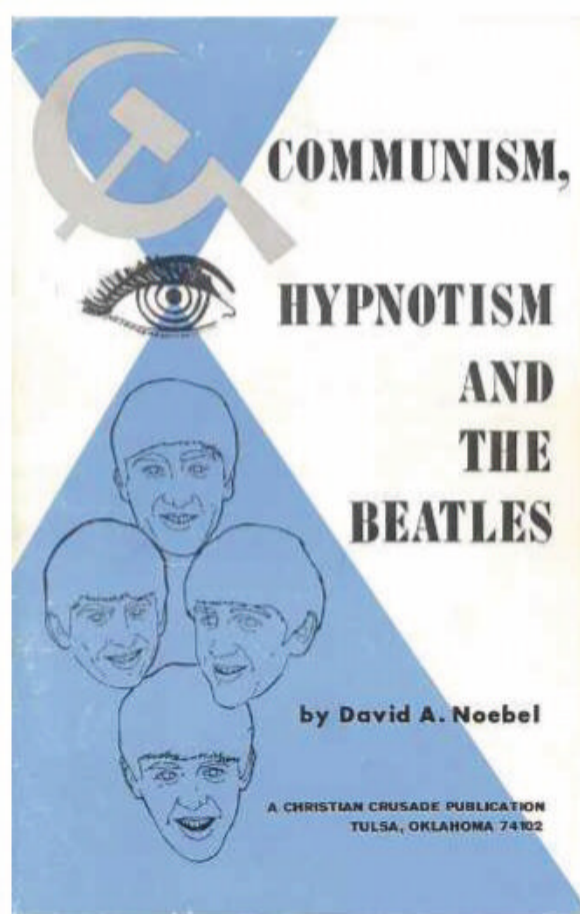


WILLIAM LOVELACE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Beatlemania in full swing on the band's 1964 American tour. **BELOW:** Such unprecedented behaviour was, according to David Noebel, evidence that the four loveable mop-tops were actually part of a Communist plot to destabilise the US by turning the nation's young people into neurotic deviants.

The ur-text for such conspiracy theories is arguably the 1965 tract *Communism, Hypnotism, and the Beatles* by David A Noebel, a reverend in the Christian Crusade movement established by the fundamentalist figurehead Billy James Hargis. Like the better-known John Birch Society, this movement regarded post-war social and cultural changes in the USA as manifestations of an all-pervasive Communist 'plot against America'. Subtitled 'An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music – the Communist Music Master Plan', Noebel's essay draws on the behavioural paradigm then predominant in psychology to develop a pseudo-scientific theory of the Beatles' music (and that of other groups) as a literal form of Communist mind control. The repetitive rhythms of the music are hypnotic and induce neurotic and deviant behaviour in youthful listeners, as evidenced by the 'base instincts' on display among fans at Beatles concerts. Noebel argues that the Beatles' music leaves American youth demoralised and mentally ill and is deliberately designed to prime them for "riot and ultimately revolution, in order to destroy our American form of government and the basic Christian principles governing our way of life". He concludes by exhorting readers to "throw your Beatle and rock and roll records in the city dump... let's make sure four mop-headed anti-Christ beatniks don't destroy our children's emotional and mental stability and ultimately destroy our nation..." At this stage, 1965, Noebel's case against the Beatles appears to be predicated largely (and predictably, for a Christian

Beatles music left American youth demoralised and mentally ill



fundamentalist) upon the delinquent – that is to say, sexualised – reactions of teenagers attending Beatles concerts. The group's subsequent engagement, from *Revolver* onwards, with countercultural subjects such as psychedelic drugs, Eastern mysticism, and radical politics ensured the further elaboration of Noebel's thesis in later works such as the 1969 tome *The Beatles: A Study in Drugs, Sex, and Revolution*. One suspects that Noebel was frothing at the mouth at the release of *The Beatles* album in 1968, with its tongue in cheek Chuck Berry/Beach Boys pastiche 'Back In The USSR', and Lennon's sardonic reference to 'Chairman Mao' in the political anthem 'Revolution'.

Noebel's conspiracist formulation of the Beatles as secret mind control operatives was picked up by successive generations of right-wing American conspiracy theorists, such as the late Lyndon LaRouche (obit, FT380:30) and John Coleman, who adapted the narrative according to their own ideological preferences. LaRouche's worldview was rather unusual in that he saw the British monarchy as the secret movers and shakers behind American and world history, rather than the usual suspects such as the Illuminati, Freemasons, Jews, Catholics, or aliens. LaRouche considered the Beatles to be a 'psychological warfare' operation developed by British intelligence to culturally destabilise American society through the promotion of undesirable social behaviour. In a 1980s essay entitled "The Beatles and the Aquarian Conspiracy", Coleman outlined his belief that the Beatles



ABOVE LEFT: Lady Gaga is one of a number of contemporary stars believed to be using Illuminati symbolism to send subliminal messages to pop audiences.

ABOVE RIGHT: The idea of occult symbols appearing in music videos has become so well known that artists like Kanye West now knowingly employ such imagery.

were functionaries of the London-based sociological research organisation the Tavistock Institute, working on behalf of a globalist Illuminati cabal labelled 'The Committee of 300'. Tavistock constructed the Beatles in order to culturally engineer drug use amongst American youth through the 1960s Aquarian counterculture, as a key part of the Committee's totalitarian masterplan for the takeover of the USA. In a nice irony, Coleman names Theodor Adorno as the writer of the Beatles music and lyrics, arguing in one passage that Adorno used the Beatles as a means of introducing the "12-tonal system of music" into popular culture. This system of "heavy, repetitive sounds" represents a revival of the baleful rites of paganism, being "taken from the music of the cult of Dionysus and the Baal priesthood".

A more recent example of this line of thought is a 2012 online essay entitled 'The Beatles – Illuminati Mind Controllers'. Some of its more startling claims are that the title and 33-song tracklisting of the 1988 *Past Masters* compilation are coded Masonic symbolism, and that Lennon's transcendental ballad 'Across the Universe' is about demonic possession as it refers to 'devas', a type of spirit from Hindu religion that was appropriated as a mainstay of Theosophical thought (George Harrison's 1970 solo hit 'My Sweet Lord' no doubt also gave Christian fundamentalists conniptions through its blasphemous mingling of 'hallelujah' and 'hare krishna').

These lurid claims of musical mind control have metamorphosed into the most common contemporary manifestation of popular music conspiracy theory: the claims

Symbols include eyes and triangles, mirrors, and butterflies

that many leading American pop musicians are agents for the 'super-conspiratorial' organisation known as the Illuminati (see **FT258:32-39**). Although there are endless permutations, the basic premise is that pop megastars such as Beyoncé, Rihanna, Lady Gaga, and Ariana Grande are using occult symbolism associated with the Illuminati in their lyrics, music videos, stage performances, and artwork as a means of subliminally conditioning the populace to accept and perpetuate Illuminati control. The performers themselves tend to be portrayed less as active collaborators with the Illuminati than its unwilling victims: a common theme is that the musicians involved have at some point early in their careers been subjected to traumatic mind-control techniques, typically those developed by the CIA as part of its notorious Cold War MK-ULTRA programme. These techniques, such as fracturing the psyche into a variety of alternate personalities (or 'alters'), enables such performers to be readily programmed as Illuminati minions. The bouts of emotional and mental breakdown commonly suffered by pop artists are often interpreted by conspiracy theorists

as evidence of the performer's suppressed true self challenging the dominance of its Illuminati alters. Typical symbols include anything related to eyes and triangles, as befits the Illuminati icon of the 'all-seeing eye in the pyramid' (which graces the American \$1 bill); mirrors, as an obvious metaphor for multiple personalities; and butterflies, a coded reference to Project Monarch, the division of MK-ULTRA allegedly dedicated to mind control. This particular conspiracy narrative has become so well-established online over the last several years that many popular musicians, notably hip-hop artists such as Kanye West and Jay Z, now knowingly use Illuminati tropes as signifiers of cultural transgression in a manner comparable to the long established use of Satanic motifs in heavy metal music culture.

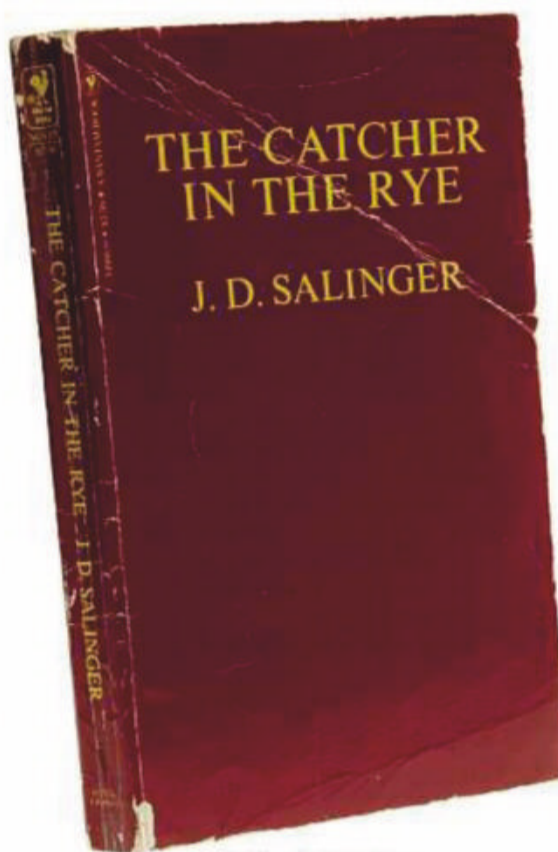
HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN

Popular music is a hazardous line of work, as evidenced by the long string of musicians who expired at an early age. Most of the victims succumb to one of the standard perils of the 'rock'n'roll lifestyle', namely substance abuse, mental illness or touring-related accidents. However, for many conspiracy theorists, the major cause of death for pop musicians is assassination as part of a conspiratorial plot. This manner of despatch is particularly favoured amongst those subscribing to the 'pop-Illuminati' narrative. For example, the official explanation for Michael Jackson's unexpected demise in 2009 at the young age of 50 was heart failure caused by long-term abuse of prescription drugs. A cursory search around this topic online will



ABOVE: Crowds gather outside the Dakota Building, on New York City's Central Park West, where John Lennon was shot dead by Mark David Chapman (right).
BELOW: Chapman's copy of JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, which some conspiracy theorists believe was a device in Chapman's mind control programming.

quickly find conspiracy websites arguing that Jackson was 'offed' by the Illuminati because he was beginning to challenge his programming through the release of coded information via his album covers, music videos, and stage performances. Concerned that Jackson might publicly expose their agenda, Illuminati operatives killed him in a manner that could be readily attributed to natural causes. Similar narratives quickly sprang up online around the death of Prince in 2016. Thematically, such theories offer a positive twist on the established 'pop star as Illuminati puppet' scenario by portraying these musicians as hero or martyr figures who used their celebrity to challenge Illuminati control; this position can also be used by fans wishing to make their idols impervious to criticism; the 2019 documentary *Leaving Neverland*, which exposed Jackson's history of alleged pædophilia, has been debunked by some pro-Jackson conspiracists as an Illuminati psy-op designed to irrevocably tarnish Jackson's reputation. Another variation of this particular theory is that the Illuminati regularly demand 'blood sacrifices' from among the ranks of entertainers, with recent victims including Tupac Shakur, Kurt Cobain, Amy Winehouse, and Whitney Houston (see FT340:32-37 for yet another take on this theme: actor Randy Quaid's 'Star Whackers' conspiracy). Some conspiracists have also retrospectively extended such speculation back to the post-war beginnings of the modern pop era, placing a sacrificial gloss on the tragic demise of musicians such as Buddy Holly, Otis Redding, Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley, and Bob Marley.



The foundation for this conspiracy theory resides in the death of John Lennon in December 1980. Although this event did not happen within the timespan of the Beatles' career, unlike the 'Beatles as Communists' and 'Paul is Dead' theories outlined above, it was indubitably linked to the culturally iconic status Lennon had acquired as a member of the band. In late 1980 Lennon, a resident of New York City, had broken several years of musical inactivity and released a comeback album entitled *Double Fantasy*. Mark David Chapman, a mentally disturbed fan, developed a fixation on Lennon and travelled from Hawaii to New York, where, on 8 December, he tracked

Lennon down to his home at the Dakota Apartment building and fatally shot him. Fenton Bresler's 1989 book *Who Killed John Lennon?* was the first major airing of the conspiracy theories that developed in the years following Lennon's murder. The core hypothesis was that Chapman had been turned into an assassin through CIA mind control techniques and was used by the American intelligence community to kill Lennon because the latter's combination of super-celebrity and leftist politics constituted a threat to the values and ideology of the 'American establishment'. Much of the evidence for this hypothesis revolved around interpretations of Chapman's aberrant behaviour as proof of mind control rather than obsessional psychosis. For example, Chapman occupied himself reading a copy of the classic JD Salinger novel *The Catcher in the Rye* both while staking out the Dakota apartments before the murder and while calmly waiting for police to arrive after the event, leading to speculation that the book was a key device in Chapman's mind-control programming.

IT'S ALL TOO MUCH

So why did these particular conspiracy narratives develop around the Beatles' music and career? A simple answer might be that they were a side-effect of their unprecedented fame: as the most internationally successful popular music group of the post-war period, it was perhaps inevitable that they would attract the attention of fringe ideologues and obsessive fans. However, figures like Elvis had achieved similar levels of international

success before the Beatles without spawning conspiracy theories as a by-product. The roots of these conspiracy theories instead reside in the Beatles' relationship with the 1960s counterculture. As defined by contemporary scholars like sociologist Theodore Roszak (obit, **FT281:29**), the counterculture was a cultural sensibility, most evident in the developed countries of the West, that sought to oppose and provide an alternative to the mainstream values of consumer capitalism, Cold War militarism, and social conservatism. Roszak identified the major factors of the countercultural worldview as an 'alienation' from mainstream society, in favour of social transformation via 'communitarian' ways of living, 'oriental mysticism' and 'psychedelic drugs' (see **FT356: 40-47**).

From *Revolver* onwards, the Beatles actively aligned themselves with the counterculture for numerous reasons related to their personal interests, social milieu, and artistic development. The bandmembers' introduction to LSD during 1965-1966 (McCartney was the last Beatle to trip, but the first to publically admit doing so) had a massive impact upon their musical output over the next three years, especially in relation to Lennon's songwriting. This is evident in key songs of their 'psychedelic period' such as 'Tomorrow Never Knows'; 'She Said, She Said'; 'Rain'; and 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. George Harrison's burgeoning interest in Hindu spirituality led not only to pioneering 'world music' crossovers such as 'Love You To' and 'Within You Without You', but also to the Beatles' endorsement of the transcendental meditation movement in 1967-1968 (an infatuation that was short-lived for the other

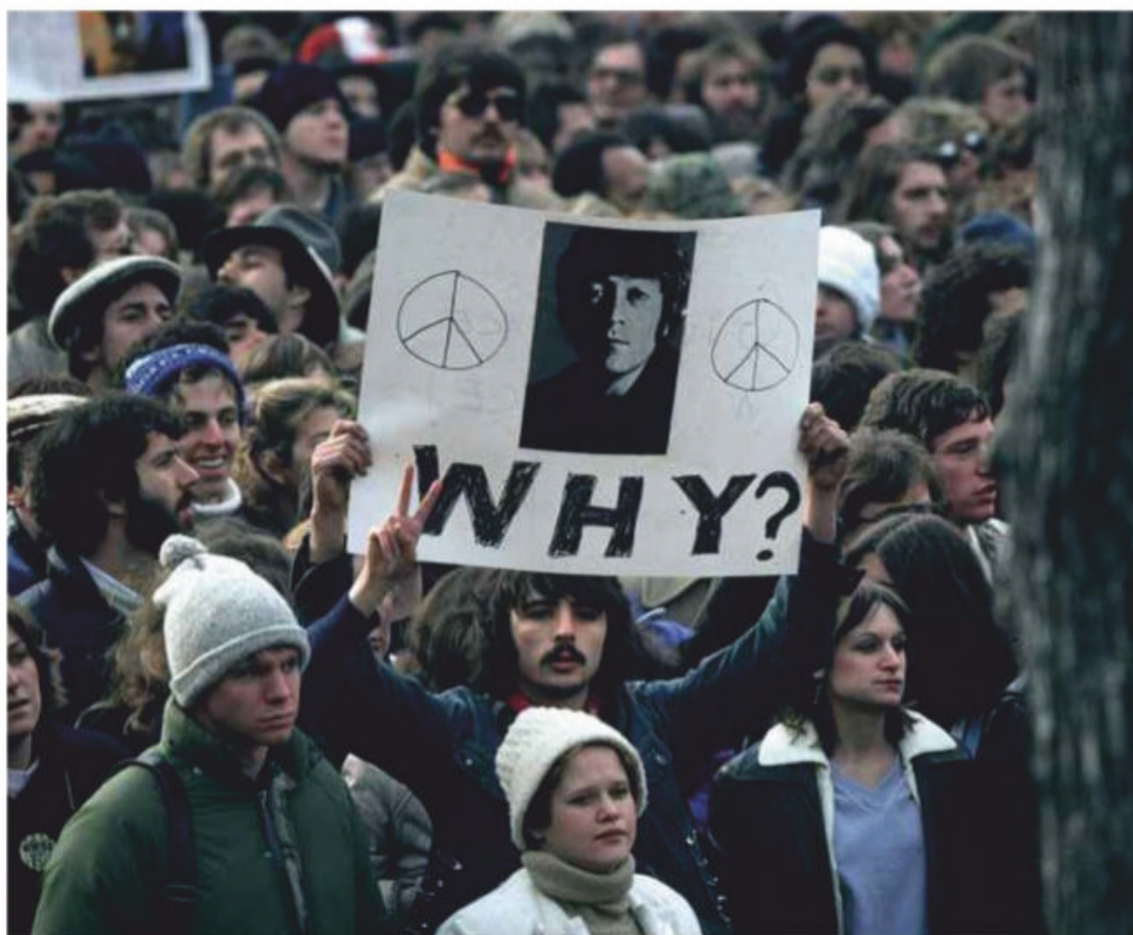
band members, as reflected in Lennon's scathing attack on the Maharishi in the *White Album* song 'Sexy Sadie').

Although the Beatles made few overtly political statements in their music, 1968 saw Lennon address the counterculture's radical political ideals (albeit in a deeply ambivalent fashion) in the single 'Revolution' and its album remake 'Revolution 1'. As the most popular band in the world, the Beatles' endorsement of countercultural values in their lives and music rendered them hugely influential agents of change for 1960s youth. Therefore, it is unsurprising that fundamentalist and nationalist conspiracy theorists such as Noebel, LaRouche, and Coleman would fixate on the Beatles as a prime example of their belief that contemporary pop music, and the counterculture it was associated with, were sinister forms of mind control. This was compounded by the band's quintessential Englishness: their standing as figureheads of the 'British Invasion' of the American pop charts in the mid-1960s perhaps being taken a little too literally by these ultra-patriotic Yanks.

The mythologising of the Beatles as countercultural icons also underpins the conspiracy theories that developed round Lennon's murder. Shaped by personality changes and his relationship with the avant-garde artist and feminist Yoko Ono, Lennon's commitment to countercultural politics became particularly prominent from the end of the Beatles through his early 1970s solo work. This is reflected in the many 'activist anthems' he recorded during this period – 'Give Peace A Chance', 'Power To the People', 'Imagine', 'Merry Xmas (War Is Over)' – and political actions such as the

'sit-ins for world peace' he and Ono staged in 1969. The mythology associated with the late-1960s Beatles therefore became largely identified with Lennon himself: his symbolic status in this respect accruing more complex and poignant layers of cultural resonance as the idealism of the counterculture withered in the 1970s environment of political and economic disenchantment and decline. For those shaped by the progressive political sensibilities of the counterculture, Lennon's murder in 1980 marked something of a symbolic death for the generational values he embodied: especially as 1980 was the year in which the ideology of neo-liberalism – the ostensible antithesis of the counterculture – began its ascendance to international dominance. It is this symbolic dimension that arguably serves as the foundation for the conspiracy theories that Lennon was assassinated by US intelligence agencies, since the major line of reasoning behind such theories is that Lennon was killed on the grounds that his influential status as a celebrity radical rendered him a high-profile subversive in the eyes of the American establishment. In other words, Lennon was killed because of the countercultural values that he represented rather than what he knew or did (these latter both being more traditional political reasons for assassination).

In terms of post-war cultural histories, the Sixties were also marked by changing perceptions of popular music. Where previously pop had been considered as ephemeral, escapist entertainment, the countercultural zeitgeist of social change and creative experimentation led to creators and audiences increasingly perceiving it as an art form. This change is evident in the



ABOVE LEFT: John Lennon and Yoko Ono pose on the steps of the Apple building in London, holding one of the posters they distributed to the world's major cities as part of a peace campaign protesting against the Vietnam War. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Lennon fans hold a vigil following his murder in New York in December 1980.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The Beatles and their wives and girlfriends at the Rishikesh in India with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, March 1968.

Beatles' music from *Rubber Soul* onwards, in which the band sought to both emulate and outdo peers such as Bob Dylan and Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys in terms of lyrical and compositional sophistication. Alongside the influences of LSD and Indian music, the Beatles also drew inspiration from the rich currents of 20th century modernism. Songs such as 'I Am the Walrus' and 'A Day In the Life' were daubed in shades of surrealism and existentialism; avant-garde composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage inspired the outright experimentalism of tracks such as 'Tomorrow Never Knows' and 'Revolution 9'; while leading UK Pop artists such as Peter Blake and Richard Hamilton were commissioned to design the artwork for *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *The Beatles* respectively.

These influences meant that the Beatles' music became increasingly layered and multi-faceted, moving away from the visceral simplicity of their early beat idiom into the realm of songs as artistic 'texts' that could be interpreted by audiences in terms of numerous levels of 'deep meaning'. This aesthetic shift rendered their music ripe for over-interpretation by conspiracy theorists, such as Noebel, LaRouche and their epigones, and also fans; the mingling of fan obsession with conspiracist exegesis is clearly evident in the 'Paul is Dead' conspiracy theories. Furthermore, tragic

evidence for such dynamics at play can be seen in the nexus of fandom, conspiracy theory, and psychopathology that constituted the infamous Manson Family murders in 1969. Los Angeles cult leader (and wannabe rock star) Charles Manson was convinced that the Beatles were spiritual emissaries who were secretly conveying messages to him through their lyrics. Upon the release of *The Beatles* in late 1968, Manson interpreted songs such as 'Revolution 9', 'Piggies', and 'Helter Skelter' as encoded prophecies of a forthcoming apocalypse, inspiring him to despatch his 'Family' to commit the Tate-LaBianca murders as a means of helping bring this about (see FT383:34-40).

Arguments can also be made that the Beatles themselves invited such over-interpretation, in the form of the self-reflexivity that crept into some of their later work. In his magisterial Beatles study *Revolution In The Head*, the late music critic Ian MacDonald makes this point in his analysis of the song 'Glass Onion'. This contains several references to other Beatles songs, and includes a verse about 'I Am The Walrus' that proved integral to the 'Paul is dead' mythos: "I told you about the walrus and me, man/ You know we're as close as can be, man/ Well here's another clue for you all/ The walrus was Paul". MacDonald argues that such fan-baiting self-referentiality, in combination with Lennon's application

of modernist/avant-garde aesthetics of 'creative randomness' (such as backwards recording, tape loops, and studio banter) in many late Beatles tracks, resulted in a sensibility in which "listeners were left to generate their own connections and make their own sense of what they were hearing, thereby increasing the chances of dangerous misinterpretation along Mansonian lines".

Conspiracy theories have become such a staple of today's pop music culture that it's easy to think of this as a recent phenomenon. Yet, 50 years on from *Abbey Road*, it's worth remembering where the long and winding road of pop conspiracy theories began...

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- ♦ DEAN BALLINGER teaches media studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. He has previously written for FT on Stanley Kubrick, David Bowie, and Mark E Smith.

THE WORLD'S LONGEST BEARDS

JAN BONDESON presents some notes from the annals of pogonotrophical extremism

In the annals of medical curiosities in general, and trichological abnormalities in particular, extreme pogonotrophy (growing of facial hair) is a somewhat neglected area of research: not even those indefatigable chroniclers of the medical freaks of yesteryear, Messrs Gould and Pyle (see **FT257:44-46**), have much to say about the longest beards in the world, and their proud cultivators. It is recorded that John Mayo, painter to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who flourished in the first half of the 16th century, had what was thought to be the longest beard in the world: although a tall man, he was at risk of treading on it. He was very vain concerning his beard, and usually fastened it with a ribbon to his button-hole, although he would sometimes untie it on the order of the Emperor, who took great delight in seeing the wind blow it into the faces of his courtiers.

In their brief discussion of extreme hirsutism, Gould and Pyle note the seven Sutherland sisters, whose hair reached the ground, and a man with a beard that trailed on the ground when he stood upright and measured 7ft 4in (2.2m) when examined by a certain Dr Leonard of Philadelphia. But there is much more to say about the great pogonotrophists of yesteryear.

BRITISH BEARDIES

Scotland's greatest bearded celebrity was Alexander Wilkie, of Craigie, Perthshire, who boasted a beard 7ft 6in (2.3m) long. This hirsute Scotsman was eclipsed by a challenger from south of the border, the Tunbridge Wells labouring man Richard Latter, who possessed a beard 10ft (3m)



LEFT: A postcard of bearded local celebrity Richard Latter, stamped and posted in Tunbridge Wells in 1907. **FACING PAGE:** The greatest of French beardies, Louis Coulon.

in length, which he normally plaited and concealed underneath his coat so it would not impede his work. Another bearded celebrity was Amos Shrigley Broadhurst, who was born in 1842 and lived in Congleton, Cheshire, for many years. He became known for the extreme length of his beard, and in the 1890s he was contracted by the freak show at Barnum and Bailey and Wombwell's Menagerie. Thus he spent his middle age in comfortable idleness, travelling around the provinces and being exhibited for money as a curiosity. When not on show, he wrapped his beard up and coiled it down into his waistcoat pocket. Amos Broadhurst died in January 1905 and was buried at Astbury Church, Congleton. His beard, which measured 14ft (4.3m), was cut off after death and sold for an unrecorded sum at Mr Stevens's auction rooms in Covent Garden in May the same year.

FRENCH FACIAL HAIR

In the Francophone world, there was also strong interest in pogonotrophic extremism. The greatest French bearded celebrity was Louis Coulon, born at Vandenesse in the Nièvre in 1826. It is recorded that he first had to shave at the age of 12, but he soon gave up the razor altogether. A short, wiry man of morose appearance, he worked as a mechanic and lived in Montluçon, near Clermont Ferrand, for many years. In the 1880s, when he was

He first shaved at the age of 12, but soon gave up the razor altogether





ABOVE LEFT: Another fine postcard showing off Louis Coulon's record-breaking beard. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Luc Prost, the Parisian bearded celebrity, in a postcard stamped and posted in 1906. **BELOW:** Victor Preux, the Belgian bearded wonder, doing interesting things with his extensive facial hair.

first taken notice of in the newspapers, he boasted a hirsute attachment 7ft 6in (2.3m) in length, which he coiled around his neck to be able to do his work unimpeded. An 1891 newspaper feature said that a German with a 5ft (1.5m) beard had been exhibited before Professor Virchow, and Mr J Keith of Texas had a 7ft (2.1m) beard; but Louis Coulon still held sway with what was presumed to be the longest beard in the world. PT Barnum had telegraphed all three pogonotrophists to invite them to join his freak show, but the German declined due to indifferent health, the Texan had family and flocks to look after, and the grumpy old Frenchman refused to cross the Atlantic for any amount of money.

Louis Coulon issued his first picture postcard in 1901, when he was 75 years old, and its considerable success caused many other cards to follow. The French people found it *très amusant* to purchase postcards featuring the old countryman with the prodigious beard, and the pockets of Coulon and the postcard company were kept well filled as a result. According to a 1904 newspaper feature, his beard measured a trifle less than 15ft (4.6m) in length; it had never been cut or trimmed and was



perfectly white in colour. The excellent sales of his postcards, which were sought after by lovers of curiosities all over France, induced two bushy-bearded rivals to come forward. One of them was Luc Prost, born in the Franche-Comté but currently living in Paris. In 1905, when he had been cultivating his beard for five years, it measured 30in (75cm) in length; three years later, when he issued another postcard featuring his bushy facial adornment, it had reached 35in (90cm). Victor Preux, an old man born in Wasmes, near Mons, in Belgium, issued a postcard of his own, showing off a beard 8ft 2in (2.5m) long.

BEARDS ACROSS THE OCEAN

In 1883, the German American Adam Kirper was featured in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*. About 20 years earlier, he had grown a very long beard, which he cut off and sold to the Chicago Museum for \$75. He had then cultivated yet another impressive facial adornment, which measured 12ft 6in (3.8m) when measured in 1883. He normally wore it wrapped in a leather girdle around his waist, but when indoors, he allowed it to hang down to its full length so that he could use it to warm his feet if the weather was cold.

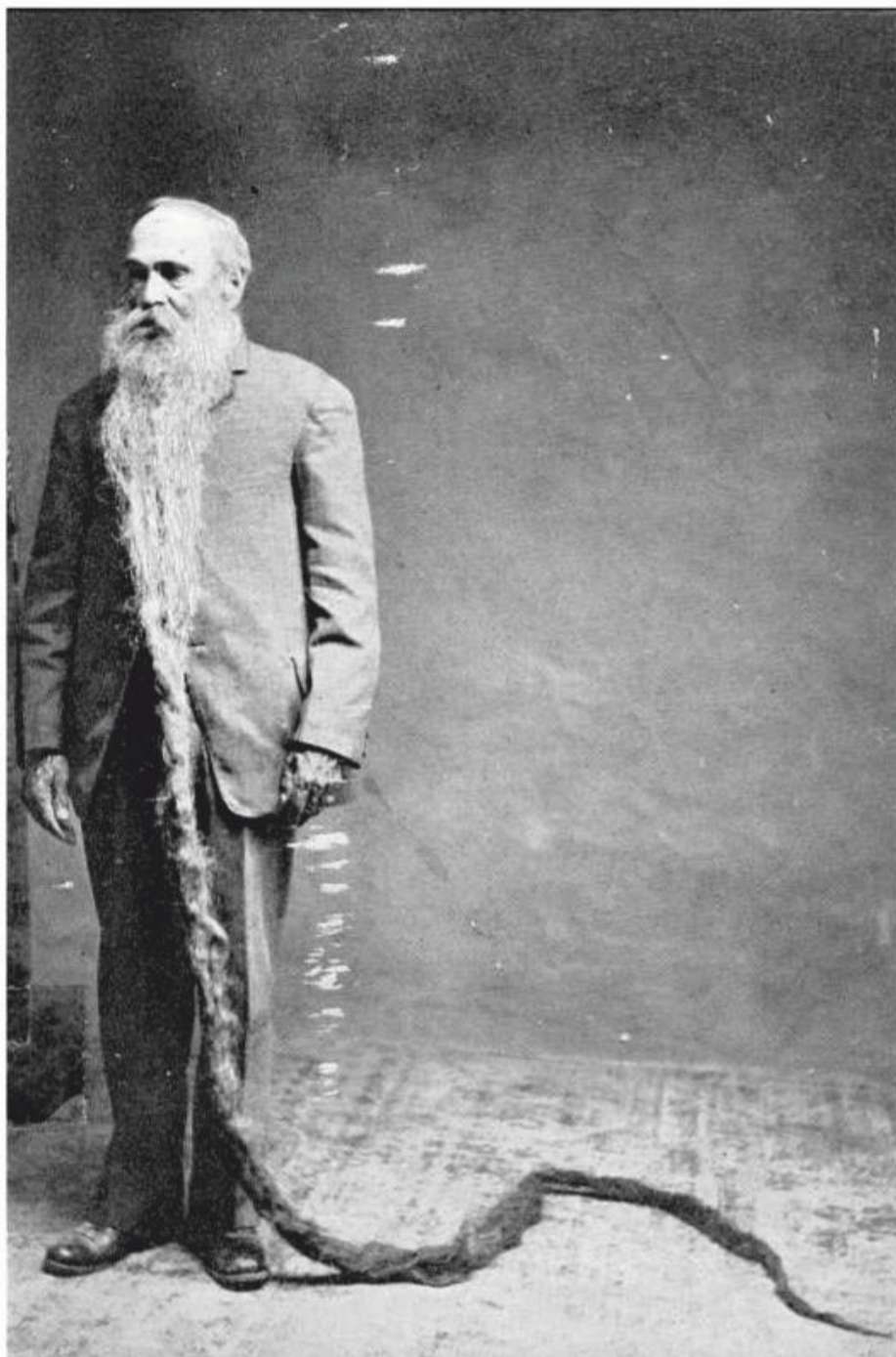


WELLCOME COLLECTION



SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TOP: A young girl 'skips rope' using the 17ft (5.2m) beard of Hans Langseth of North Dakota. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Langseth aged 66. **ABOVE RIGHT:** National Museum of Natural History physical anthropologists Lucille St Hoyme, J. Lawrence Angel and Thomas Dale Stewart hold Langseth's beard on its arrival at the Smithsonian in 1967.

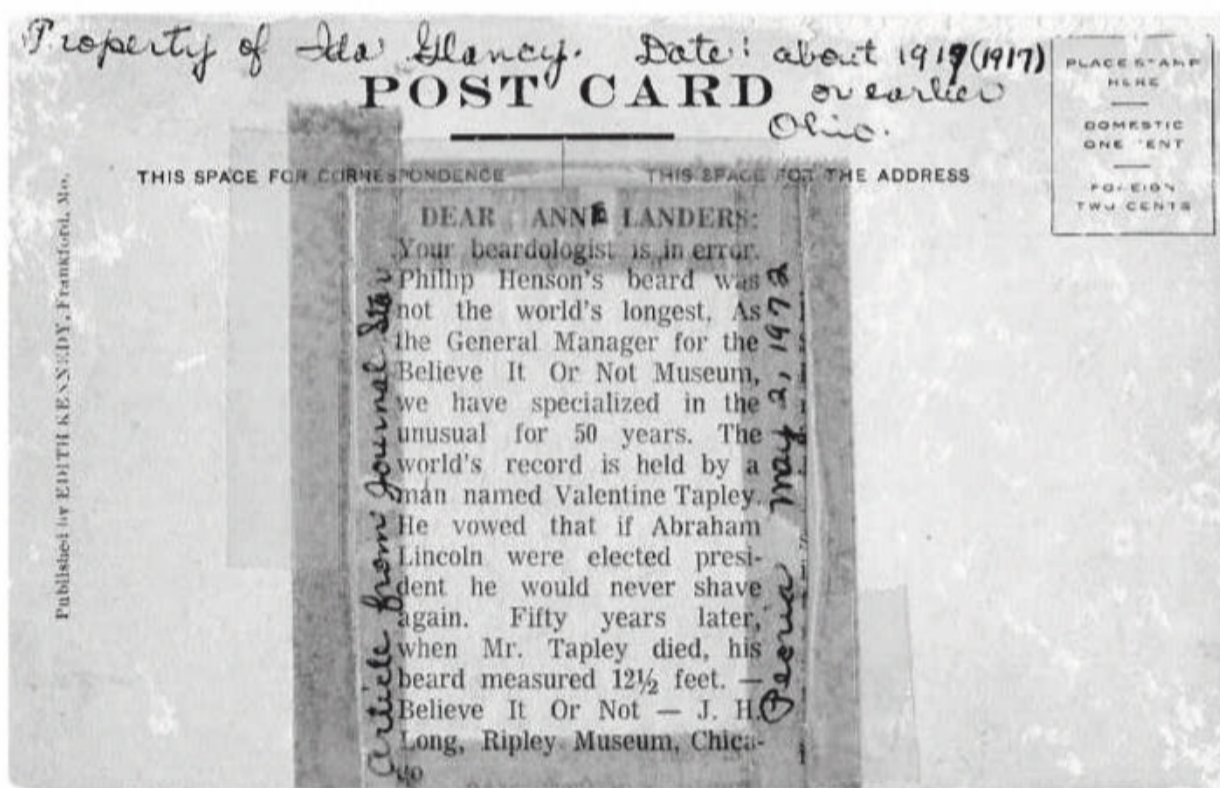


BETTMANN / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT AND BELOW: A postcard featuring Valentine Tapley, with an interesting note on the back. ABOVE RIGHT: Zach T Wilcox of Carson City, Nevada.

He had made a will directing that his beard should be cut off after death and sold to the highest bidder; the money was to benefit his 40-year-old beardless son.

Valentine Tapley was born in North Carolina in 1830, the oldest of four children. When he was a teenager, his family moved to Pike County, Missouri. A sombre, gloomy character as a young man, Tapley was a firm Democrat who abhorred Abraham Lincoln when he was standing for President in 1860. He swore that if Abe got elected, he would never shave again. As we know, Lincoln became President, and Tapley put his razor away – for good. The Lincoln assassination five years later did not change his mind, and for every year that went by, his beard kept growing. He soon became a local celebrity, and in the 1880s and 1890s, when his beard was more than 10ft (3m) in length, he was repeatedly given offers by proprietors of travelling shows to join them and become a full-time freak. But Tapley was a morose and introspective character, who liked to live quietly at his large farm near Frankford in Missouri, and had nothing but disdain for money and display. He never went on show and used to wear his beard rolled up



under his shirt, wrapped in a silk cloth, to avoid the gaze of the curious. In the early 1900s, he was featured on a picture postcard, but it was sold only locally, and is today uncommonly met with. Since he was worried that thieves would exhumate his coffin after death to cut off his beard

and sell it, he ordered a reinforced tomb to deter them. This tomb was put to use in 1910, when Tapley died after a short illness; his beard had kept growing as the years went by and measured 12ft 6in (3.8m) when examined post mortem.

Hans Nilsen Langseth was born in



ABOVE: The seven Sutherland sisters show off their luxuriant tresses, out of which they made a successful stage career. **BELOW:** Sarwan Singh is currently the proud owner of the longest beard on a living person according to *Guinness World Records*.

Norway in 1846. As a young man, he emigrated to the United States with his wife Anne and became a farmer in Kensett, Iowa. When still a youngster, he took part in a local beard-growing competition and decided never to shave or trim his beard again. Langseth had five sons and a daughter. After the death of his wife, he moved to another farm in Glyndon, Minnesota. In his old age, he joined the freak show and toured the country to show off his 17ft (5.2m) beard. In 1922, when he took part in a show in Sacramento, his beard was officially proclaimed the longest in America; the runner-up, Zach Wilcox from Carson City, Nevada, had only cultivated 12ft (3.7m) of facial hair. Langseth died in 1927, at his farm at Barney, North Dakota; his remains were later moved to a grave next to that of his wife back in Kensett. His beard was cut off after death, and changed hands more than once. It is today in the collection of the Smithsonian. It measures 17ft 5in (5.3m) and has been proclaimed the longest beard in the world by *Guinness World Records*.

HAIR TODAY

Body hair is genetically programmed to grow to a certain length, which varies from person to person. Thus, a few individuals have the potential to cultivate hair, and in the case of males also a beard, that is long enough to reach the ground, but the vast majority of us do not; pogonotrophic extremism thus depends on the combination

Langseth's record still stands today, and probably will for years to come



of the physiological quirk of having the ability to grow very long facial hair with the mental quirk of wanting to cultivate a prodigiously long beard. Gould and Pyle mention a woman seen in London by Dr Erasmus Wilson, whose hair was 5ft 5in (1.7m) long, and also the seven Sutherland sisters, who had 37ft (11m) of hair between them, and enjoyed a successful showbusiness career. Long hair was seen as representing femininity at the time, and many women came to see the sisters exhibiting themselves, and to buy a patent medicine they peddled, intended to promote the luxuriant growth of female tresses.

Having a large, bushy beard could quite possibly represent masculinity, but is otherwise entirely pointless; most of the historical pogonotrophists have normally kept their facial adornments wrapped up out of sight, to prevent them from stepping on their own beards by mistake, or getting them stuck in rotating machinery, with potentially disastrous consequences. Hans Langseth's record still stands today, and probably will for many years to come; the Guinness record holder for the longest beard on a living person is Sarwan Singh, a jolly-looking Sikh living in Canada, whose beard measures 8ft 2.5in (2.5m).

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THE HILL ABDUCTION ON SCREEN

The Bumbry Encounter, a new short film based on the 1961 abduction of Betty and Barney Hill, asks what it means to be an alien in America. **NIGEL WATSON** explores the relationship between the Hill case and the representation of alien encounters in cinema and television.

Betty and Barney Hill's alien abduction in 1961 (see **FT110:28-31, 195:24, 262:48-50, 276:30, 296:72-73, 299:24, 302:69**) is a perfect story for adaptation to the big screen. It has all the elements of a horror story, including Betty's nightmares, the isolation and terror of seeing something inexplicable on a lonely road late at night, the medical examination with sexual overtones by the aliens and the fear of lasting physical and psychological damage.

Sceptical ufologists, like Martin Kottmeyer, have noted that the Hills' story is so cinematic because it unconsciously borrows from a range of UFO-themed films and television programmes of the period. For instance, Kottmeyer claims the wraparound eyes of the aliens described by Barney could well have been influenced by the alien featured in the 1964 "Bello Shield" episode of *The Outer Limits* TV series. Kottmeyer more convincingly argues that the film *Invaders from Mars* (William Cameron Menzies, 1953) offers many similarities with Betty's experience: they both feature aliens with large noses, examination tables and needles. In one scene of the alien examination room, the curvature of the floor and a conduit give the overall impression of a hypodermic needle being inserted into an abdomen.

British ufologist John Spencer notes that there are many similarities between the Hills' story and an episode of Gerry Anderson's *Fireball XL5* puppet TV series. This features short aliens with bald heads who are able to block the memories of humans so that they can continue their nefarious activities unmolested. The episode titled 'Robert to the Rescue' was broadcast in 1962. He notes that even if the Hills did not see this episode, they and the programme makers were drawing on the same sources of inspiration. The film *Earth versus the Flying Saucers* (Fred F Sears, 1956), loosely based on Donald Keyhoe's book *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*, also includes many similarities to the Hill case, Spencer suggests.

Whatever the influence of cinema and



ABOVE: Betty and Barney Hill.

TV on the Hills' unusual experiences, their case repaid the favour by becoming the subject of the well-regarded TV movie *The UFO Incident* (Richard A Colla, 1975). It might be expected that the aliens in this would look like those in *Invaders from*

Mars; instead, they have small bodies and big heads. This was the first appearance of what Richard Dengrove calls the "full-fledged Grays" that went on to become the standard appearance for aliens. Ironically, Betty claimed the aliens shown in *The UFO*



LEFT: A scene from *Invaders from Mars*, in which the alien examination room resembles a giant “hypodermic needle being inserted into an abdomen”. **BELOW:** An extraterrestrial from the ‘Bellerophon’ episode of *The Outer Limits*. **BOTTOM:** Grey-like aliens examine Betty Hill in the 1975 TV movie, *The UFO Incident*.



Incident were not very close to what she had seen, which “did not look like that. The real ones looked more human than their television counterparts.”

The TV movie encouraged more people to report abductions and nudged the whole alien abduction bandwagon into mainstream popular consciousness. In Britain, the film did not get much, if any, exposure at the time, which might account (possibly combined with a less enthusiastic use of hypnosis) for the slower rise and lower number of abduction reports here.

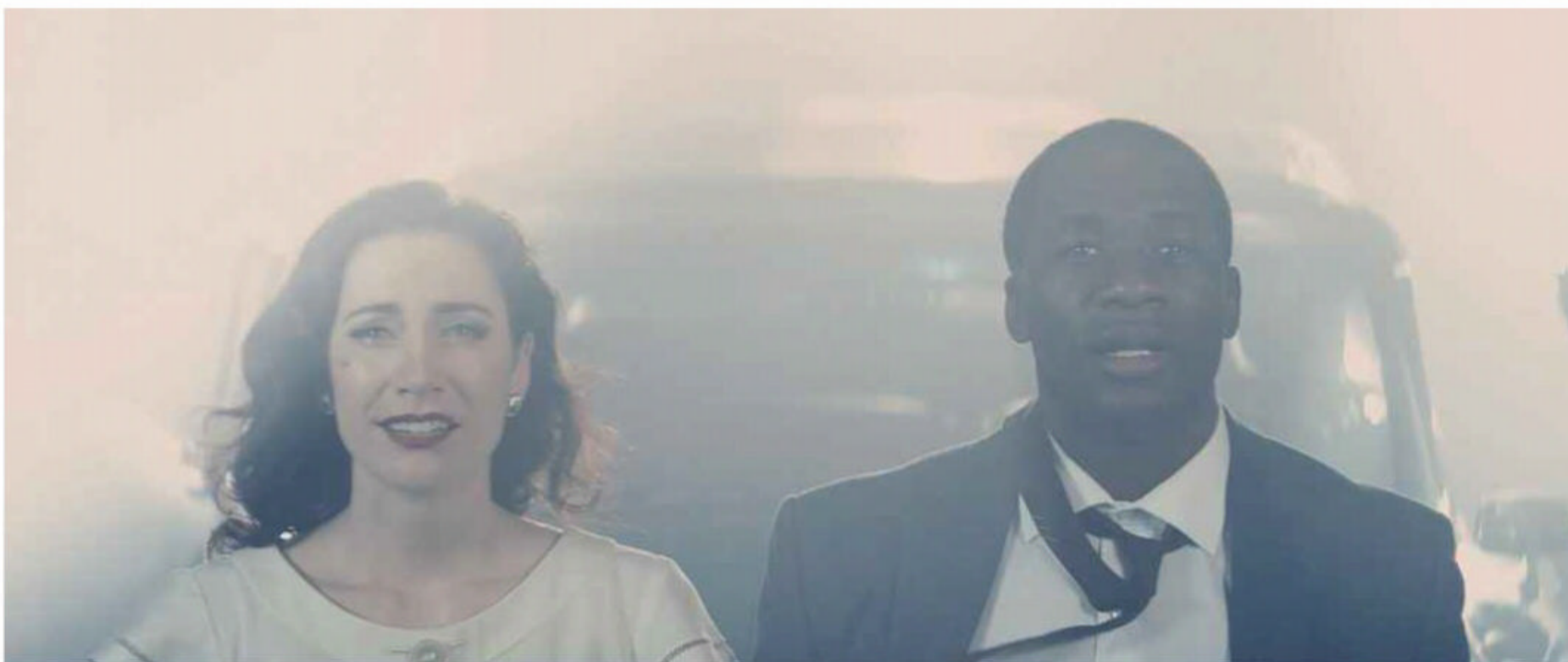
The UFO Incident is a sober and gripping, almost documentary-style, exploration of the Hills’ story that addresses the fact that Barney (played wonderfully by James Earl Jones) has suffered from racial prejudice since childhood and has a deep sense of guilt over leaving his first wife and children. Furthermore, he is shown as being stressed by his long commute to work and by the fear of missiles being fired by the Soviet Union. It’s no surprise he suffers from ulcers. The subsequent hypnosis sessions conducted by Dr Simon (Barnard Hughes) powerfully show the sheer horror Barney experiences when ‘recalling’ his period of missing time onboard a flying saucer. We also see how Betty (Estelle Parsons) wants to learn more about the aliens and, unlike Barney, does not want to repress or dismiss the whole experience.

Barney has suffered from racial prejudice since childhood



THE BUMBRY ENCOUNTER

Now, we have a new – and long overdue – short film that is based on the Hill case. *The Bumbry Encounter*, despite its short duration, is undoubtedly the best UFO film I’ve seen in a long time. It kicks off with mixed-race couple the Bumbrys driving at night when they see a UFO. Most of the action takes place the next day, in their home, when the shady psychologist Dr Bancroft (Ross Turner) turns up with a



ABOVE: Lauren McFall as Jackie Bumbry and Skipper Elekwachi as Terry Bumbry. **BELOW:** The writer/director of *The Bumbry Encounter*, Jay K Raja.

gaggle of police officers and interviews the traumatised Jackie Bumbry (Lauren McFall). Meanwhile, her husband Terry Bumbry (Skipper Elekwachi) is dealt with in a separate room – much as the aliens separated the Hills inside their flying saucer.

Jackie is shocked by Dr Bancroft's increasingly personal questions and his suspicions about how she got a black eye and torn dress. Dr Bancroft is overtly racist towards her husband, regarding him as just as much an 'alien' as any extraterrestrial invader. The police lurking in the background seem to be passive lackies who unquestioningly do the doctor's bidding. We are not sure of Bancroft's real mission: is it to cover up, on behalf of 'the authorities', a UFO encounter with 'real' aliens, or is he simply trying to uncover what he perceives as the brutal truth of the matter?

This ambiguity, and writer/director Jay K Raja's outstanding use of special effects, lighting and quirky employment of music, turns the film into a thoughtful and intriguing contemplation about just what we regard as alien.

I was fortunate to be able to speak to Jay K Raja, and we discussed his interest in UFOs and the making of *The Bumbry Encounter*.

NW: What are your favourite UFO cases?

JKR: I've been a UFO fanatic since I was a kid and basically devoured any story that could point to the truth. The Hill Incident is probably my favourite – it really set the narrative for how these abduction cases would go, and my interest in the case is what ultimately led to the film. There are some cases of mass sightings and ones with the military that are particularly fascinating due to how much evidence exists and how the reports are from multiple, often professional, individuals.



“I feel that the ‘U’ in UFO really does stand for unidentified”

NW: Do you believe UFOs are extraterrestrial? And do they really abduct people?

JKR: That's a tough one, because, yes, I absolutely believe that there is extraterrestrial life. Far too much space and time for there not to be. Do I believe they've been to Earth? Maybe. Do I believe the landmark UFO cases that we've had, especially in the United States, are actual alien visitors? Doubtful. While I

am always on the lookout for proof and want to believe, I remain a sceptic and feel that the 'U' in UFO really does stand for 'unidentified' – not 'extraterrestrial'.

NW: What are your favourite UFO movies?

JKR: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, easily. It's so well made and has this seat-of-the-pants emotional intensity. All the characters in the movie are so mesmerised by the UFOs and aliens – it's a religious experience.

NW: What do you think of TV series like *Project Blue Book*?

JKR: Unfortunately, I haven't had a chance to see that one. But the real Project Blue Book is a wealth of information that tells us not only about UFOs and the like, but also American culture at the time and the existential fears folks were experiencing in a Cold War world.

NW: *The Bumbry Encounter* is based on the abduction case of Betty and Barney Hill. What made you choose this particular story?

JKR: I was drawn to the nature of the couple. At first, it was mostly because they were the exact opposite of the stereotype of people who claim to have had an encounter like this. They didn't have anything to gain by it and the incident was a massive disruption in their lives. There were minor theories (refuted, if I recall correctly) that the Hills may have had a shared delusion or breakdown as a culmination of tensions due to their mixed-race relationship; it was pre-Civil Rights, and many states still had anti-miscegenation laws. While I don't put much stock in that being the cause in the real story, it was a compelling set-up for a short piece of sci-fi.



ABOVE: Ross Turner plays Dr Bancroft, a shady and openly racist psychologist brought in to quiz the Bumbrys about their close encounter.

NW: The blatantly racist attitudes shown towards the mixed-race couple in your film are shocking, and are at the core of the story. Did you have alternative narratives or endings?

JKR: Yes, we flirted with a few different ideas of how to end it; but, ultimately, we felt that leaving it a bit open to interpretation was the best way to go. Don't misunderstand me: the villains are entirely in the wrong and what they claim is wholly untrue. But what happens after the final scene is still a mystery, and while we did try endings that show us a bit more context and conclusion, none of them quite landed right and they felt extraneous when the movie has already said everything it needs to with the current ending.

NW: Your film suggests brainwashing is employed for the Bumbrys' own good, but you leave this open. Do you think there is a government cover-up, or that the government is involved in psy-ops?

JKR: Well, there's already a history of the US Government at least *trying* to get involved with it. The MK Ultra programme was all about that. Have they made any progress? Who knows? I certainly hope not!

NW: Have you seen *The UFO Incident*, which was based on the Hills' story? What other films/media had an influence on your production?

JKR: I watched a bit of it years ago but didn't get too far. Not that I didn't enjoy it, it's just that even early on I had a feeling I wanted to do something with this premise and didn't want to get too influenced. Cinematographer Jerome Stolly and I slammed through much of Spielberg's filmography while prepping this movie. The movies shot by Allen Daviau were at the

top of our list and that look really formed the foundation for our choices in *The Bumbry Encounter*.

NW: Was making the film very complicated? Did you consider showing aliens or alien craft?

JKR: On paper, it seemed fairly straightforward: two main characters, mostly one location, dialogue-based. But the actual production ended up being more complex. A big challenge was that we shot all the night exteriors against green screen on a soundstage. This meant every environment had to be built up from scratch. Thankfully, our producer/editor Roth Rind is also a visual effects wizard: he designed and created miniatures, then combined them with live action plates and CGI elements to create the final effects. The abduction sequence basically uses every trick in the book and Roth employed them fantastically to get what we needed for the final film.

NW: Can you tell us a bit about the making of the film, and the cast and crew?

JKR: It took over two years from the first draft of the script to the final draft of the film, and my cast and crew tolerated me for that long – which I think is a feat in and of itself! The crew were not strangers. Roth and I had been working with all of our keys for years on end, and by the time we made *The Bumbry Encounter*, we were good friends and had a working shorthand. We met cinematographer Jerome Stolly during a 48-hour film contest and, in an instant, we knew that it was going to be a long-term collaboration. Micah Embry Wilmott production-designed my thesis film back in college, Ashley Elieff has been designing amazing costumes for us for years, and Dalina In was the first make-up artist I

worked with when I moved back to the Bay Area after finishing school. I couldn't ask for a better team – they're the ones who make the movie sing.

NW: Would you like to expand this into a full-length feature film or TV series?

JKR: It was originally conceived as a series, but with each episode following new characters and scenarios within the same world. Certain characters might reappear over different stories, and we'd see connections and relations, but each episode would have its own stand-alone plot. In the end, I think it stands as a short, whether or not a series comes of it.

NW: Do you plan any future paranormal or UFO-themed films?

JKR: Most likely we'll come back around to it. We're currently exploring more terrestrial ideas, but I would love to explore more about the vast history of UFOs.

***The Bumbry Encounter* is on release at selected festivals. For details see: <https://www.facebook.com/rothrindproductions/>**

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✦ **NIGEL WATSON** is a UFO researcher and regular contributor to FT. He is the author of *The UFO Investigations Manual* (Haynes, 2013) and *UFOs of the First World War* (The History Press, 2015).



UFOS: UNDIFFERENTIATED FASCIST OBJECTS

SD TUCKER seeks an audience with the Chilean diplomat and Nazi mystic Miguel Serrano, a man with a very wide circle of famous friends – some of whom were very wide and circular themselves.

Even those who think the UN a pointless talking-shop would have to concede that at least one of its subsidiary bodies, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), does some vital work trying to stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons. As such, it is profoundly disturbing to hear the views held by one of its former affiliates, the late Chilean diplomat Miguel Serrano (1917–2009). A fanatical Nazi and anti-Semite, Serrano believed the liberal post-WWII world-order was a gigantic Jewish plot intended to create “a hallucinating phantasmagoria destined to dissolve and exploit the Aryan universe”, an attempt to impose false values upon society and scientific reality itself, via “robbery and witchcraft”. Post-war folk lived in a relativistic world, where traditional values were continually being rethought, but the ultimate relativistic realm was the subatomic one revealed by Jewish scientists like Albert Einstein, the name of whose appalling ‘Theory of Relativity’ said it all. Jewish scientists were “just like Picasso”, Serrano argued, as with the incomprehensible mathematics of subatomic theory they aimed to “abstract everything, reduce everything to pure mathematical-algebraic formulas, dissolving form, flesh [and] blood” until eventually there was nothing left of reality itself, simply a void with “no light... not even movement, only a nothing of numbers and formulas”. Quarks and electrons were “the greatest surrealisms”, much more so than Picasso’s paintings, and stood as emblems of Jewish desire to divide the world until it collapsed into total non-existence. This was the true purpose of the Jew-created atomic bomb; not to level cities in giant explosions, but to erase physical reality itself, to ensure “the atomisation of the world”.

The Aryan, Serrano said, was “not interested” in dividing the atom, but instead “aspires to the *unus mundus*, to totality”, wanting to unite reality into a coherent whole. This was why Adolf Hitler, who had secretly invented the first atom bomb “by his own means”, refused to use it. The bomb “did not correspond to the integrating, non-atomising Archetype in his Aryan collective unconscious.” If he



LEFT: Miguel Serrano, as Chilean Ambassador in Austria, greets Queen Elizabeth II at the Austrian Presidential Palace in Vienna, May 1969.

HE THOUGHT HITLER WAS AN AVATAR OF HINDU GOD KRISHNA

had used the bomb, Hitler “would not have won the war, he would have lost it, since he would have Judaised his own world, using an extreme Jew method.” Possibly the bombs dropped on Japan were Hitler’s own unused ones, stolen by the Americans. Hitler, as a magician, knew it was the hidden invisible realm of magic which truly underpinned Creation, not subatomic Jewish nonsense. Numbers as we knew them today were fake Jewish inventions, which the ancient Romans had sensibly done without, having “other means of calculation”. “For Aryans,” wrote Serrano, “atoms have never been numeric, abstract, empty formulas. They are gnomes, magic Runes, the atomic Gods.”¹ As Serrano spent his childhood talking to fairies in his garden, later climbing mountains in search of a gateway into “The Kingdom of the Gnomes”, we should take these claims literally.²

EVER INCREASING CIRCLES

According to Serrano, Hitler had also tried to create an ‘anti-atom bomb’ weapon, which would unite, not divide, the world. This wonderful technology was spiritual in form – it was the UFO. In 1945 Hitler had vanished from the physical world and travelled into the invisible dimension of the Aryan gods and Platonic Forms by transforming himself into a disc of pure light, what the ancient Hindus called *vimanas* (see FT372:51) and we term flying saucers. It was possible to build a solid mechanical saucer, said Serrano, as towards the end of the war the Nazis had done so (see FT175:42-47), but Hitler, by mastering unifying Aryan cosmic forces rather than divisive Jewish atomic ones, had managed to transmute himself into a flying disc by spiritual alchemy alone. This “legendary anti-gravitational science of the spirit” would never be available to the non-Aryan, for only the racially pure had access to “the Science of Peace” which allowed them to become circular.³ Circles, the stereotypical shape for UFOs ever since Kenneth Arnold’s famous (misreported) sighting in 1947, were traditional symbols of unity. A friend of CG Jung, Serrano would have known of the Swiss psychologist’s notion that circular UFOs were symbolic human projections of the age-old circular Hindu-Buddhist symbol of the *mandala* into the sky (see FT264:40-45). Jung saw 1950s UFO-mania as embodying a yearning for political wholeness during the divisive Cold War era, when atomic conflict threatened to blow our equally round planet apart. So to Serrano it made sense that, when you saw a big round disc in the sky, it was likely to be a pro-CND Nazi flying sorcerer like Rudolf Hess in disguise, not Martians in a nuts-and-bolts spaceship.⁴

For Serrano, WWII had an esoteric purpose, lurking below Hitler’s surface aim of conquering Europe. This was to turn Germany increasingly circular until, with a magical “click”, it vanished into another dimension – as happened with



MIGUEL SERRANO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Miguel Serrano relaxes at his home in Chile in this 1996 photograph.

the Führer himself. The Third Reich was the manifestation of another reality upon Earth, the perfect realm of the Aryan Soul. Once it had appeared, Hitler drew a magic circle around Germany, as symbolised by his swastika sun-wheel in its white circle on the sacred Nazi flag. In the centre of this circle stood a pole about which the Sun-wheel would spin – Adolf Hitler, the ultimate wheel within a wheel. When the Nazis started Germany spinning around this “hypnotic, irresistible centre of attraction”, the magic circle counteracted those other hypnotic Jewish forces of abstraction which had done so much to dissolve the rotten modern world. By the end of WWII, “swirling, swirling, every time faster” until it “had reached a velocity of vertigo”, Hitler’s mystic circle caused Nazi Germany to suddenly disappear down a cosmic plughole, with all those “Circular Folk” who remained faithful to the war’s hidden purpose, like Goebbels (but not Himmler, who got scared

at the last minute), “breaking away from this material world” along with it, becoming *vimana*-discs as they did so. Buildings ‘destroyed’ by Allied bombs had simply slipped into another world, for now. The ruined Germany left behind was thus not the real Third Reich, which lived on invisibly behind the scenes until, one day, it and its buildings would re-invade Earth as a new, saucer-armed Fourth Reich, accompanied by the ancient Nordic gods with their awesome lightning-weapons, and loyal SS men transformed into the Wild Hunt: they would destroy our world in order to save it.⁵

PILGRIMS AGAINST PROGRESS

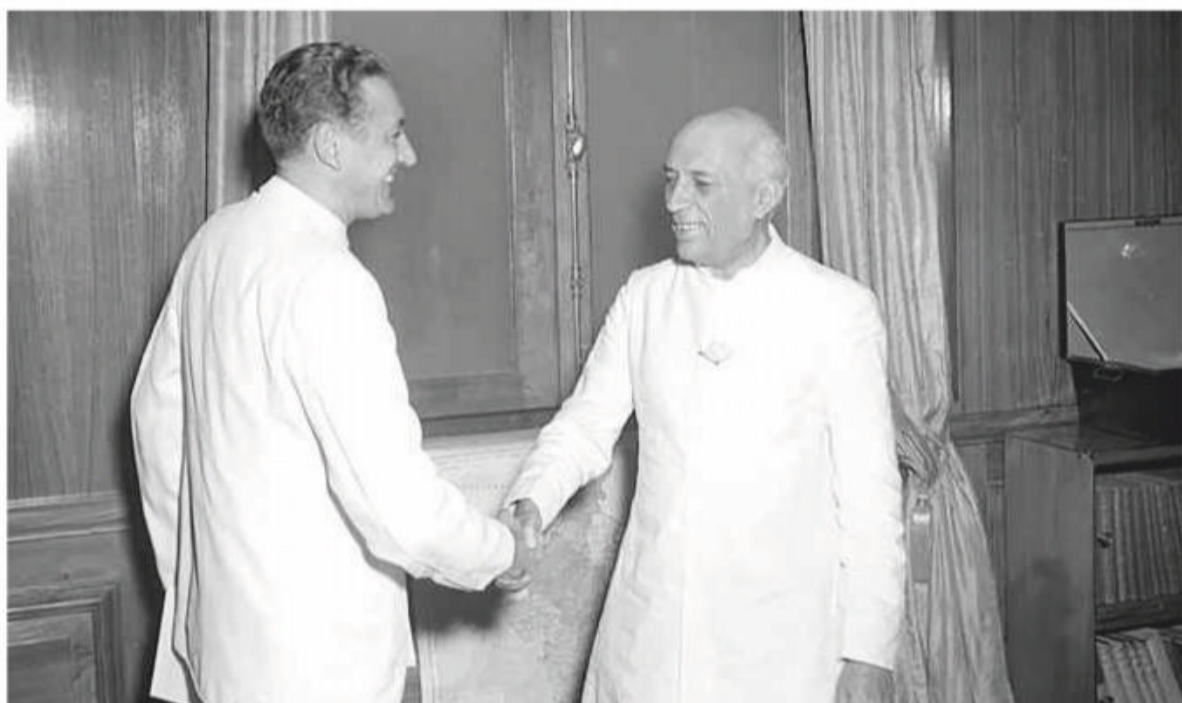
Serrano only set his beliefs down in book form following his forced retirement as a diplomat, most notably in 1984’s *Adolf Hitler – The Ultimate Avatar* where, right on the very first page, he admits that “I am from another planet”, which sounds about right.⁶ The planet he truly hailed from was

that of Planet Savitri Devi, his sometime correspondent and fellow occult neo-Nazi, whose work as ‘Hitler’s Priestess’ FT has already examined (see FT369:46-53). Like Devi, Serrano thought Hitler was an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu who possessed the powers of both Sun and lightning, and would one day incarnate himself again to combat the evil Jewish forces of *kali yuga*, a Dark Age of inversion in which humanity found itself trapped. When Hitler returned, he would destroy civilisation so it could rise anew, peopled only by a select few Nazi Aryan supermen, perfect reflections of the Godhead itself. ‘Progress’ was an illusion, and history followed a cyclical, circular path, not a straight line ever upwards. He also shared Devi’s belief that Hitler had deliberately abstained from sex to preserve his sacred lightning-infused sperm for a higher cause, guessing he used it to feed his own astral body, so it could become a *vimana*. Serrano knew such methods could



work because he had personally engaged in them, but was forced to change tack following marriage, when his wife became scared by poltergeists that latched onto his pent-up sexual energy, breaking furniture “to pieces” and making objects float (another defiance of ‘Jewish physics’?). Eventually Serrano had children, but Hitler, being a *mandala* and thus containing all undifferentiated opposites within himself, even male and female, became pregnant himself, with “an entire world that he is bringing to light: the world of the Fourth Reich, the new Golden Age, the Other Earth.” Perhaps because of his own ghostly marital problems, Serrano doubted Hitler and Eva Braun had married during their final days in the Führerbunker at all, speculating this was just a lie put about by “the genius of Goebbels” so Jews couldn’t say Adolf was gay. If Hitler was married to anyone, it was probably to a Valkyrie.⁷

Devi’s 1958 travelogue *Pilgrimage* had special sway upon Serrano. It detailed Devi’s journey across a defeated Germany, visiting places of Nazi import like Hitler’s birthplace and his parents’ grave. Adolf, Devi wrote, had “raised Germany to the status of a Holy Land... inseparable from the early history of the perennial Religion of Life”, Nazism. This was “not a metaphor”.⁸ Devi’s trip culminated at the Externsteine, a numinous rock formation possibly used in rituals of ancient pagan Sun-worship, which she saw as early forerunners of the later battle of Nazi Sun-children against the Judeo-Marxist forces of *kali yuga* darkness, “the struggle of the Powers of Light against the Powers of Gloom”. At this ‘German Stonehenge’, Devi performed magic rites to hasten the return of Hitler’s spirit. She lay overnight in



a stone coffin and temporarily ‘died’, talking with “the Heathen Soul of the Rocks”. Then, a Nazi miracle occurred: “An icy-cold sensation ran through me, as though... the power of Death had emanated from the stone. Then, as I stretched myself on my back, in the posture of the dead, I distinctly saw... a violet spark – a tiny lightning – flash out of the dark vaulted rock above my head.” Was it Hitler, Lord of Lightning, urging her to keep the fascist faith? That dawn, Devi offered up her gold swastika earrings to the pagan gods, raised her right arm in a Nazi salute, and hailed the rising Sun – natural emblem of the Immortal Führer’s inevitable return.⁹

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

In 1982 Serrano followed in Devi’s footsteps. He especially enjoyed his holiday visit to Heinrich Himmler’s five-star SS Black Order

castle of Wewelsburg (see FT196:32-39). To Serrano, Germany’s castles were giant supernatural machines built to facilitate the transformation of souls into *vimanas*, and open magic portals. Wewelsburg was “a magnetic centre full of ghosts”, whose sacred architecture facilitated “a mutation” of SS-men into *Sonnenmensch*, or ‘Sun-people’. Himmler, “nothing more than a phantom”, was telepathically controlled by “a truly invisible centre” into making Wewelsburg a “Laboratory of Leftwards Magic... built according to... Aryan mathematics” where the SS “broke apart their physical bodies and materialised their astral body”. Finding “a small room with a seat of honour”, Serrano saw it was the throne of King Arthur, who was really Hitler. It would seat the astral body of “the Führer-Parsifal”, so he need not leave his office to monitor proceedings of Himmler’s SS Black Knights of the Admirably Round Table. With fellow Nazis, Serrano enacted a strange ritual. With right arms raised, Devi’s acolytes “began to emit soft tones... [which] rotated and swirled in such a way we felt we would disintegrate on this plane of existence, perhaps to reach an Other Universe, going out through the hallucinatory vortex, by the maelstrom of the Swastika of Return of the Black Sun, to reassemble ourselves in the non-existence of the Green Thunderbolt.”¹⁰

Serrano had intended to visit Devi in Europe during his own pilgrimage, but she died shortly beforehand. So, he travelled to the Externsteine to commune with her spirit. As his surname meant ‘Mountain’, Serrano had an innate affinity with rock-formations of all kinds, which allowed him to see their true nature, as when, during a vision, he had realised the Andes were really petrified giants, covered over in stony sleep by the forces of *kali yuga*.¹¹ Likewise, he perceived the Externsteine itself had been built by a race of Titans, via “the projection of mind over cosmic and terrestrial plasma”. It was really a giant symbol, saying that “only a hard character... firm as the rocks



COURTESY SAVITRI DEVI ARCHIVE

TOP: Serrano the globe-trotting diplomat, seen here meeting Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India.
ABOVE: Cat-loving, Hitler-worshipping esotericist Savitri Devi was a major influence on Serrano's thinking.



JOHN MACDOUGALL / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

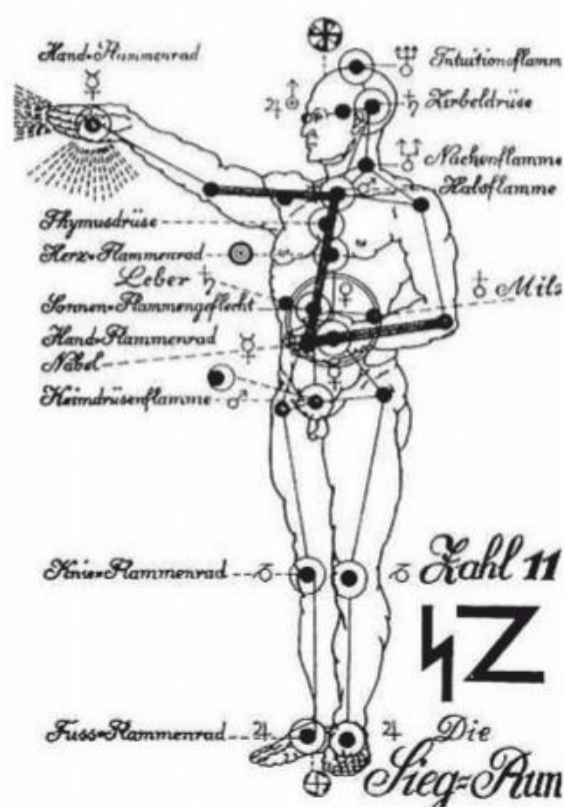
ABOVE: The SS-designed ‘vault’ of Himmler’s Wewelsburg Castle, a Swastika at the zenith of its domed roof. **BELOW:** The Sieg Rune, from Serrano’s *Adolf Hitler: The Ultimate Avatar*. “The doubled left arm gathers in energy into the Manipura Chakra and projects it, like a ray of the Black Sun, with the right arm extended. Its mantra is Heil!”

of the Externsteine, will be able to change the Destiny of the Darkest Age.” Here, in the ancient stone coffin, Serrano “passed a night with Savitri Devi... Odinic priestess of Esoteric Hitlerism” where, in the darkness, he saw “the Original Light”, just as Devi had done. This gave Serrano faith he would meet Devi in Valhalla, “together with the Führer and Wotan”. ¹²

MAGIC, MAESTRO, PLEASE

Devi was not the only source of Serrano’s beliefs. Born into an aristocratic family of poets and diplomats in 1917, as the proud possessor of blond hair and blue eyes, Serrano considered himself an Aryan and joined the Chilean Nazi Party (the *Nacistas*) in 1939, just in time for WWII. In 1941, while running a pro-Nazi journal, Serrano visited the Italian Embassy, where Mussolini’s Cultural Attaché, Hugo Gallo, owed him some articles. But Gallo offered Serrano something else instead: the chance of fighting Hitler’s war “on other levels” – on the astral plane. He introduced Serrano to a guru named ‘The Maestro’, who ran a secret yogic cult devoted to Hitler. Serrano was then suffering bouts of sleep-paralysis, and The Maestro gave an appealing explanation: Serrano had potential magic powers, and his astral body was struggling to escape him. ¹³ Nazism, said The Maestro, was secretly a religion, not a political movement, and Hitler

VENUS WAS NOT JUST A PLANET BUT A GATEWAY TO HYPERBOREA



lived in two realms, visible and invisible, simultaneously. So could Serrano. Another dimension, named variously the Green Lightning, the Black Sun, Hyperborea, Valhalla or simply outer space, lay open to him – the world of the immortal Aryan Archetypes and Platonic Forms, who were really the old Norse gods like Wotan and Thor. Venus was not simply a physical planet, but also a gateway into Hyperborea, through which Hitler, Nazis and Aryan gods could pass in astral form, or as UFOs, or maybe even in UFOs, as, being symbols of unity, many top Nazis existed in both material and immaterial form concurrently (thus accounting for the manifold contradictions in Serrano’s narrative... probably).

Hitler could also travel astrally, often vacating his physical frame and allowing Wotan to possess it; but this involved dangers, as Wotan’s godly strength “could make the vehicle explode”, a bit like Mr Creosote. However, Hitler’s explosion might be reverse-atomic in nature, and could well cause the Jewish *kali yuga* world to transmute instantly into a perfect Aryan one “in an action difficult to apprehend”. The Maestro claimed to have visited Hitler at the Eagle’s Nest in spirit-form, where Adolf, through binoculars, had spotted him flying about and told him to get off his property. A second meeting had later taken place within the Hollow Earth – or its astral equivalent –



ABOVE: Serrano and friends unblock their chakras with a spot of vigorous Sieg Heiling at a rally in the 1990s.

where Hitler's spirit-body, sporting a natty new long moustache, had survived the fall of Berlin. In 1945 Hitler was transported by Admiral Dönitz to the South Pole (or Hyperborea) in a submarine (or in a UFO, or as a UFO) where he lay sleeping (but also awake) in a cave (which wasn't a cave), where he was guarded by the twin ravens of Odin, prior to his later resurrection, like the slumbering King Arthur or Frederick Barbarossa in legend. This was why 'Operation Barbarossa' was the chosen codename for his ruinous invasion of Russia; Hitler *intended* to lose, for then he could snooze and regenerate.¹⁴

DIPLOMATIC CIRCLES

In 1953, Serrano joined Chile's diplomatic corps, agitating to be posted to India, where he hoped he might find Hidden Brahmins, the Lost City of Agarthia, or at the very least the Kingdom of the Gnomes. Appointed Ambassador, he made friends with political giants Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and the Dalai Lama. In 1962, Serrano was made Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria, then, in 1964, Ambassador to Austria, all the while liaising with the IAEA. But in 1970 Marxist Salvador Allende became Chile's ruler, and Serrano's career was over. When a 1973 US-backed coup saw the right-wing General Pinochet claim power, one might have expected Serrano's reinstatement. However, Pinochet's Chile provided an early laboratory for "the Jew, Milton Friedman", the chief proponent of what later became Reaganite economics, to implement his free-market schemes, which Serrano found objectionable. In a 1994 interview,¹⁵ Serrano openly explained how he hated Friedman's "liberal super-capitalism", which only led to the further atomisation of society, and media brainwashing via advertising: "Today the [Jewish] Enemy works mentally using

the Kabala and electronic machines... projecting subatomic particles in order to control [Aryan] minds... today, the central war is psychotronic, technotronic and cybertronic... the whole world is hypnotised by these means... as well as... [by] Coca-Cola [and] Pepsi." The aim of the post-Cold War 'New World Order' was to facilitate "global consumer culture" which would "destroy... frontiers and nationalities", allowing mixing of blood. Then, VR technology would be used by the Jews as "a magic device in order to give the last and mortal blow to actual reality", dissolving our world into an abstract void of zeros and ones, a subatomic PlayStation holocaust we'd all rush out to buy.¹⁶

Serrano used his long retirement to develop a complex Gnostic philosophy which saw Jehovah recast as the demiurge, the evil godlet of Gnostic thought, who had sent NASA-like "probes" and "robots" down to colonise Earth in the shape of Jews and sub-men. Matter being evil in Gnostic thought, the heroic Nazi-Aryan-Alien gods had also then invaded Earth, popping through Venus from Hyperborea to combat Jehovah's wicked plans to make His spirit flesh. But Wotan & Co then mated with physical Earth-folk, diluting their blood. The holy blood of the Black Sun still ran in Aryan veins, but was under increasing threat. The Jews aimed to eradicate it via miscegenation, thus robbing Aryans of all memory of their prior existence as gods.¹⁷ Given his development of such an incredibly detailed and arcane personal cosmology, together with his capacity for undergoing odd poetic visions and walking mountains green, you might characterise Serrano as being the approximate Nazi equivalent of William Blake. Both dreamed of New Jerusalems. It's just that, in Serrano's case, there wouldn't be any Jews in it. How do you square that circle?

NOTES

General unreferenced info about Serrano taken from Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, New York University Press, 2002, pp173-192

1 Miguel Serrano, *Adolf Hitler: The Ultimate Avatar*, Editorial Solar, 1984, pp.42-47

2 Ibid., pp20-21, 156

3 Ibid., p47; Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* archaeological unit had supposedly found a magical artefact which contained instructions for building saucers, and showed them how to build Thor's lightning weapons. These saucers may have been driven by music, or the chanting of mantras, and had the power to read minds (pp134-135, 138).

4 Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess was locked away in Spandau prison only in body; his soul was free to wander elsewhere. Imitating a story by his near-namesake Herman Hesse (a friend of Serrano's), it may well be that Hess had painted a train on his cell wall, jumped on board and then escaped "into an Ultimate Flower". (Serrano, 1984, pp488-489)

5 Serrano, 1984, pp455-458, 141

6 Ibid., p10

7 Ibid., pp123-124. There were many suspicious things about those final days in the Berlin Bunker; invading Russian troops found at least 10 charred duplicates of Hitler's body lying around. The 'Hitler' who gave blundering orders to his generals towards the war's end may not have been the true Hitler at all (pp121-122).

8 Savitri Devi, *Pilgrimage*, 1958, pp1-2.

9 Ibid., pp318-354

10 Serrano, 1984, pp331-333, 348-352. Serrano says the Hitler salute has magical properties as it activates bodily *chakras* (magical energy centres) which, in illustrations, he portrays as circles with swastikas in them (there appear to be rather a lot of them up his bum). Ancient Germanic runes are really stick-man diagrams of poses which activate these *chakras*.

11 Ibid., pp20-21, 147.

12 Ibid., pp338, 343-344.

13 Thanks to The Maestro, Serrano knew exactly what to do when confronted by "a powerful dark yellow stream like an octopus with many tentacles" which assaulted him astrally in bed one night and tried to drag him to the Moon in a "lunar current". Other astral invaders gave him bowls of water, or stood on the end of his bed, crushing his feet. Serrano, 1984, pp113-115.

14 Serrano, 1984, pp.86-105, 118, 120, 133-134, 139, 143-146; In 1947/48, Serrano joined a Chilean scientific expedition to Antarctica to commune with Hitler's spirit and find himself amid the ice.

15 Or 'Year 105 of the Avatar' in Serrano's terms (Hitler being born in 1889).

16 www.renegadetribune.com/1994-interview-with-miguel-serrano; Further criticism of Pinochet and Friedman is available at <https://oregoncoug.wordpress.com/>, where Serrano argues that Pinochet's Army needed to "transmute itself into a Warrior Order... connected to a body... of invisible directors", thus transforming the small nation of Chile "into an invincible giant", with a Hitler-like leader embodying "the land of the sacred giants of the Andes".

17 In positioning Jews as cosmic opposites of Aryans, Serrano closely apes Savitri Devi's own Manichean views.

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Keeping a lid on the V-2

ANDREW MAY delves into a British case of wartime disinformation.

The notion of the government plying the public with a steady stream of disinformation is a staple of conspiracy theory. The presumed motive is to keep us in our place, and prevent the panic or rebellion that would ensue if we knew the truth. That makes sense – but so does the official line that disinformation is designed to deceive the nation's enemies, not its own people. Since it's impossible to do one without the other, the distinction between the two explanations is a fuzzy one. It may even serve the government's interests to do both at the same time – and I'll give an example where that happened in a moment.

Let's start with that "official line", though. It's an unavoidable fact that you can't say one thing to foreign spies and a different thing to members of the public, because foreign spies *are* members of the public. There's a great quote in Mark Pilkington's book *Mirage Men*, from former CIA director Richard Helms: "The public's right to know is the Russians' right to know. The Russians read our newspapers and magazines and technical journals very carefully indeed."¹

That quote dates from 1978, the height of the Cold War, when disinformation was being churned out by both sides on an industrial scale. Its most outrageous incarnation was the Strategic Defence Initiative, announced by Ronald Reagan in 1983 and popularly known as "Star Wars". Like the movie franchise after which it was named, it had no firm grounding in the laws of physics – but that didn't matter, because its sole purpose was to confuse the other side. "I don't know any technical person who



ABOVE: A *Daily Express* front page from 11 November 1944 reports that "experts" were well aware of the V-2 rocket attacks on Britain.

believed all of the stuff we said," as one of the scientists involved, Gerold Yonas, remarked later. "We were lying to the Russians. They were lying to us. The Cold War was characterised by deception on all levels."²

This high-tech brand of disinformation had its origins in World War II, when one of its most skilled practitioners was Professor RV Jones, the first physicist to be recruited into British military intelligence. Writing much later, Jones noted that "induced incongruities have a high place in warfare, where if the enemy can be induced to take incorrect action the war may be advantageously affected". Of the many cases he was involved with, "one was the persuasion of the Germans in 1943 that our successes against the U-boats were due not to centimetric radar but to a fictitious infrared detector. We gained some valuable months while the Germans invented a beautiful anti-infrared paint and failed to find the true causes of their losses."⁴

But not every wild claim is disinformation. Take the V-2 – a

giant rocket which could reach Britain from continental Europe. To most people that sounded like science fiction, and when the first inkling of its existence penetrated Britain's spy network, it was dismissed as a propaganda trick. As historian Thom Burnett put it: "The intelligence was not believed. Why? The principal reason was that the British Admiralty thought it was too good to be true and therefore had to be a devious plant by the *Abwehr*, the German intelligence service. The fantastical claims were written by psychological warfare experts to scare the British."⁴

The V-2 wasn't disinformation – but what happened after the rockets started hitting London in September 1944 was. Despite the massive destruction they caused, there was nothing in the newspapers about them. If they landed in built-up areas, where they couldn't be ignored, their effects were attributed to "exploding gas mains". This wasn't just a handful of incidents, but hundreds of them – often several in the same day – over a period of two months. The

government clearly wanted the world to believe London was suffering an epidemic of gas explosions.

Why was that? The official explanation came in a statement from the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, on 10 November 1944: "For the last few weeks the enemy has been using his new weapon, the long-range rocket, and a number have landed at widely scattered points in this country... No official statement about the attack has hitherto been issued. The reason for this silence was that any announcement might have given information useful to the enemy."⁵

But was that the real reason? All this happened several months after the D-Day landings, with the Allies advancing rapidly towards the German border. To keep up morale, the government wanted people to think the war was all but won. The *Dad's Army* style blackout restrictions had been eased, and families that had been evacuated from big cities were told it was safe to return. Londoners knew German rockets were falling on their heads, but what about the rest of the country? They remained blissfully ignorant, thanks to the "exploding gas main" story – which I suspect was aimed at them as much as the Germans.

NOTES

¹ Mark Pilkington, *Mirage Men* (Constable, London, 2010), p.255

² Nigel Hey, *The Star Wars Enigma* (Potomac Books, Washington DC, 2007), pp.210, 223

³ RL Weber, *A Random Walk in Science* (Institute of Physics, Bristol, 1973), pp.8-14

⁴ Thom Burnett, *Who Really Won the Space Race?* (Collins & Brown, London, 2005), p.30

⁵ "German Long-Range Rockets", *Hansard*, 10 Nov 1944.

◆ **ANDREW MAY** is a regular contributor to FT whose recent books include *Rockets and Ray Guns* and *Cosmic Impact*.

Hun-identified flying objects

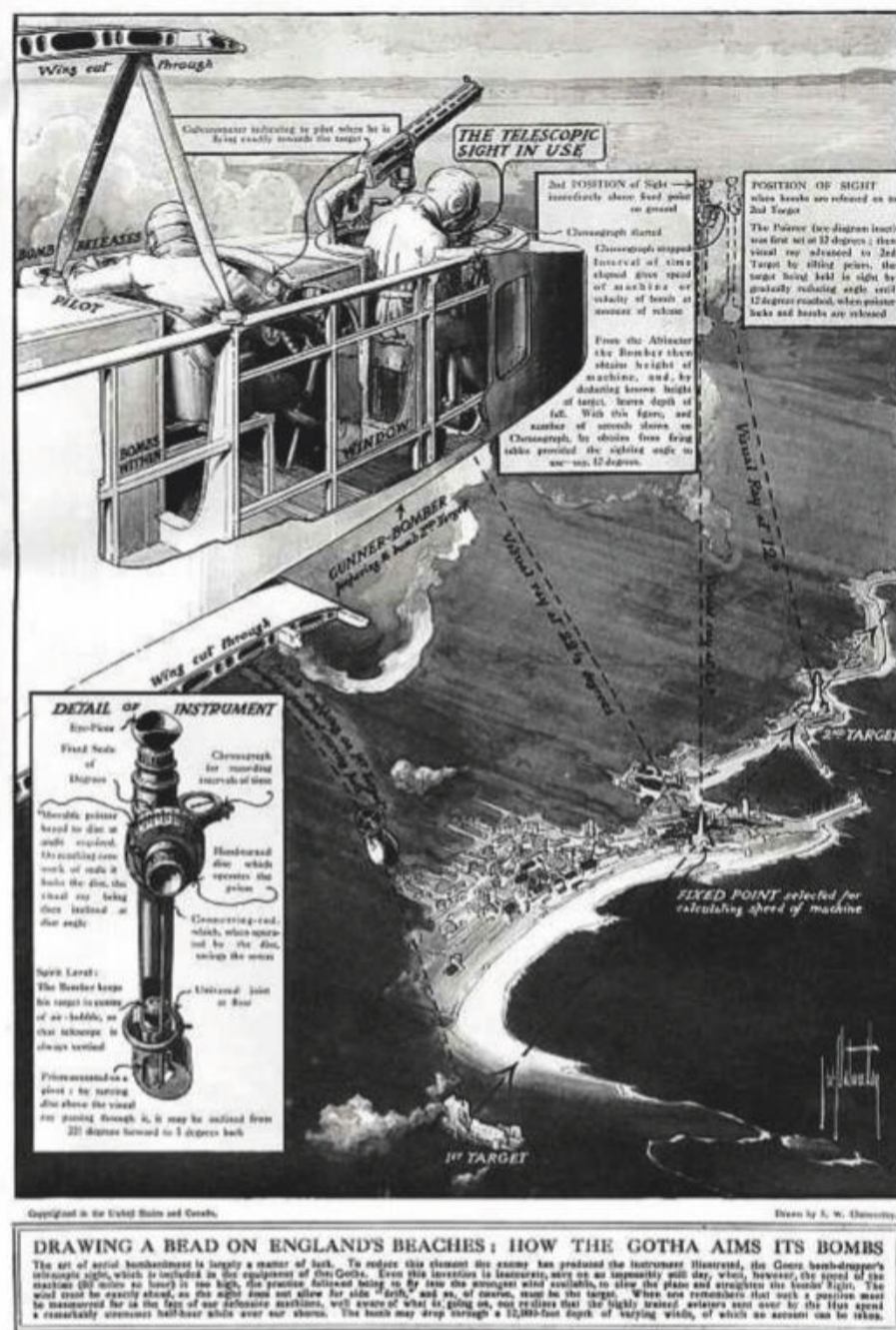
TARAS YOUNG traces the spread of aerial sabotage myths in wartime Britain.

Strange falls from the sky are forteen staples. However, during World War I and II the British press and public became fixated on rumours of a very different kind of unidentified object falling from the heavens.

Strategic Zeppelin air raids on Britain began in January 1915, bringing a taste of the horrors of war right to the British public's doorstep. The press were quick to imply that the huge craft had been designed to target the most vulnerable members of society. In January that year, *The War Illustrated* magazine ran a sensational article on the new threat entitled "The Coming of the Aerial 'Baby-Killers'". News of the airship raids had sent "a thrill – not of horror or dismay, but of disgust" rippling through the country, it said, and added that "demented Germany is gloating over the proof that their Zeppelins can cross the North Sea and kill English children". The taunt 'baby-killers', both for the craft and the crews that piloted them, stuck. However, with the development of better defensive measures against airships, Germany began to deploy a newer technology: aeroplanes.

From 1917, air raids on Britain by giant Gotha aircraft became commonplace. Amid the confusion of the attacks, the public came to believe that they were dropping more than just bombs. Psychologically primed by the Zeppelins' 'baby-killer' label, and by reports of perfidy and atrocities on the Continent, the idea spread that the German pilots were covertly dropping other mysterious items, with a specific intent to cause harm to British children.

Across war-torn Europe,



ABOVE: Diagram showing a Gotha plane aiming its bombs over Britain.

news of malicious parcels being flung from German aircraft had emerged in October 1916, when the British press widely reported that German and Bulgarian airmen had dropped "poisoned sweets, garlic saturated with cholera bacilli, and darts" on the Romanian city of Constanza¹ and "packets of poisoned sweets for children" on Bucharest.² These reports were confirmed by Helen Monfries, who was in Romania as an interpreter and driver for the Scottish Women's Hospitals.³ She had met with a Mr Juanesco, who had been present at the forensic analysis of the sweets, which were revealed to contain chloride

Cholera-laced sweets were supposedly found in Italy

of lime, a strong disinfectant. Monfries also believed the Germans were dropping booby-trapped toys: "One morning, a glittering pencil case lay in the street. A soldier saw it and picked it up. He was unscrewing the metal when it exploded, and three fingers were blown off."⁴

By the following March, the focus had shifted to France, and to the British trenches on the Western Front. Notices were posted in Amiens, on the Somme, warning residents to "be careful of sweets which the Germans drop from their aeroplanes into the British lines". These could contain "virulent cultures of cholera, plague and dysentery," the notices cautioned, and parents were told to "particularly warn young children not to pick up any sweets from the ground".⁵ In May 1917, cholera-laced sweets were supposedly found following an Austrian air raid on Codigoro, Italy.⁶ In December, "dastardly German airmen" dropped packets of soup powder at Calais; these were said to contain not only a "virulent poison" but also clearly written instructions in English, which were blamed for the deaths of a number of families. The same article mentioned that children in eastern France had recently been killed by poisoned sweets and explosive pencil cases.⁷

It wasn't long before reports of mysterious objects began to appear in the UK. In August 1917, two sweets were found in Westcliff, Southend-on-Sea, following an air raid. War Office scientists injected calves and rabbits with a solution made from the sweets, which proved to be completely harmless.⁸ Early in 1918, a special constable found a packet of chocolates lying in the road, again in Southend.⁹ The following month, a War Office official told the London News Agency that more chocolates had been found in three London districts following a German air raid. "There is reliable evidence that, besides dropping bombs, the Hun airmen have been throwing down chocolates containing poison," reported the *Daily Mirror*.¹⁰

In one case, it was claimed, "the residents of a small house heard a pattering on the roof, and when the 'all-clear' had been given, two young boys climbed



through a skylight in search of shrapnel. They found some, and were surprised to also find eight or nine chocolates.” The treats had been flattened and hardened on impact, and the boys’ father dutifully took them to the police for analysis.¹¹ The War Office spokesman added that the Germans “did it in Belgium months ago”, and warned parents to be on their guard. Analysis of the Southend chocolates showed that they were, in fact, laced with arsenic, stoking fears further.

News of the poisoned sweets’ arrival on British shores spread quickly. “Another manifestation of the barbarian methods of warfare adopted by Germany is the distribution of poisoned sweets from aeroplanes,” reported the *Chemist and Druggist*. “Chemists who have the opportunity should warn their customers against this trick to poison children.”¹² The *Daily Mirror*’s gossip column, meanwhile, had it on good authority that the “arsenic-loaded sweets” were “different in shape, size and general appearance to anything ever sold in London sweetshops.”¹³

However, reality soon dawned. Not only were the sweets found on the roof in London found to be harmless,¹⁴ but the journalist who broke the story had made the whole thing up and was fired.¹⁵ As for the chocolates in Southend, the final report officially stated that the small trace of arsenic was probably down to poor-quality glucose – “an impurity frequently met with, but without significance”. In the House of Commons, Sir George Cave reassured his fellow MPs: “Sweets found in circumstances suggesting that they might have been dropped from aircraft have been examined on several occasions,” he said, “But in no instance has any poison been found in them.”¹⁶

Naturally, such official explanations received less coverage than the original scare stories. Further reports were made of poisoned sweets dropped by Gotha aircraft in March 1918: in its archives, the Imperial War Museum holds a metal weight

which was found attached to some poisoned sweets purportedly dropped over Chatham, Kent.¹⁷ Stories began to circulate of strangers roaming Kentish playgrounds and distributing poisoned sweets to children, with several of the unfortunate youngsters being admitted to hospital.¹⁸ After this, though, stories of poisoned sweets being dropped in Britain tailed off, with no more significant reports – and still no evidence that any of the cases had been real.

However, the idea of deceptive and dangerous items being dropped by enemy airmen lodged in the collective subconscious. The advent of World War II saw paranoia about enemy sabotage return. Churchill described the fears as ‘spy-mania’: “No suspicions were too outrageous to be nourished, no tale too improbable to be believed,” he later wrote, adding that these misplaced energies often “led to the discovery of innumerable mare’s nests”.¹⁹ However, spy-mania was not entirely misplaced. The German spy agency, the Abwehr, really had begun a campaign of sabotage in the summer of 1940. Britons came to believe that the country was being overrun by enemy intelligence officers; in fact, only around 25 saboteurs managed to get into the UK, many of whom were criminals, shysters or would-be defectors and all of whom were caught.²⁰

It was in this climate of paranoia that the government’s Ministry of Home Security began recording reports of unidentified items dropped from aircraft. Over the course of WWII, the public ‘helpfully’ reported hundreds of mysterious objects they believed to have been dropped from the air by enemy agents. Setting aside chunks of plane, flares and shrapnel, almost every find proved to be completely innocuous. The reports illustrate the powerful way that the mere possibility of enemy agents committing malicious acts can stir the public imagination.

Throughout September 1940, people in Suffolk, Warwickshire, Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire,

Lancashire, Buckinghamshire, and Middlesex all reported that German planes had dispersed an alarming cobweb-like substance on their towns and villages. In Basingstoke, the sticky material was “alleged to have been dropped from aircraft, and in two cases caused blistering of the hands”. There were so many incidents that officials started recording cases of this type in a separate file. In every instance, government analysis found this terrible new Teutonic superweapon was, in fact, natural cobweb left by some assuredly British spiders making their annual migration.²¹

The following month, concerned members of the public found a black and gold object on Old Street in London. Inexplicably, it was described by some as a “jellified substance” and by others a “metallic powder, compressed into a dark plastic material”. In fact, it was nothing more than a bronze strip used in picture framing. Other mysterious objects reported by an apprehensive public that year included cabbage leaves; a small quantity of black fluid in a rubber sock; a purple balloon “which burst, affecting bystanders”; a soap-box full of maggots; yellow and red objects which were quickly identified as British weather balloons, and a greyish-white powder, which – on closer examination – was found to be powdered cane sugar mixed with gravel.²² Again, all of these proved to be totally harmless. One of the few alleged airdrops that remains a mystery is 10 half-pound tins of Lyons ‘ToffeeSkotch’ toffees found in the village of Wingfield, Suffolk. Five were painted to look like tartan handbags, while the rest had a puzzle on the lid. Officials took them to the Ipswich branch of Lyons for examination. When staff couldn’t identify them, the suspicious treats were sent away for further analysis. While there’s no record of the outcome, it’s safe to assume the findings would have revealed sweet FA.

The poison sweets myth lives on today. In 2017, the UAE-based newspaper *Gulf News* reported a

“poisonous candy-like substance” being dropped by Israeli aircraft over the West Bank, which residents described as looking like chocolate.²³

NOTES

1 *Freeman’s Journal*, 13 Oct 1916, p5.

2 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 Oct 1916.

3 *Linlithgowshire Gazette*, 24 Nov 2016.

4 This story has a curious analogue from six years earlier. A Grimsby schoolgirl named Alice Peason picked up “a brass pencil case” in the street, which exploded while she prodded the end with a hairpin. This “blew off three fingers of her left hand”, which had to be amputated at the wrist. *Lancashire Evening Post*, 22 Oct 1910.

5 *Scotsman*, 12 Mar 1916.

6 *Times*, 24 May 1917.

7 *Driffield Times*, 22 Dec 1917.

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9 *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 22 Feb 1918.

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19 WS Churchill, “My Spy Story”, *Thoughts and Adventures*, Mandarin, 1990.

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23 *GulfNews.com*, “Mysterious ‘poison boxes’ air dropped over West Bank”, 5 Feb 2017.

♦ **TARAS YOUNG** is a lifelong *FT* reader and enthusiast for odd things. His first book, *Nuclear War in the UK* (Four Corners Books),

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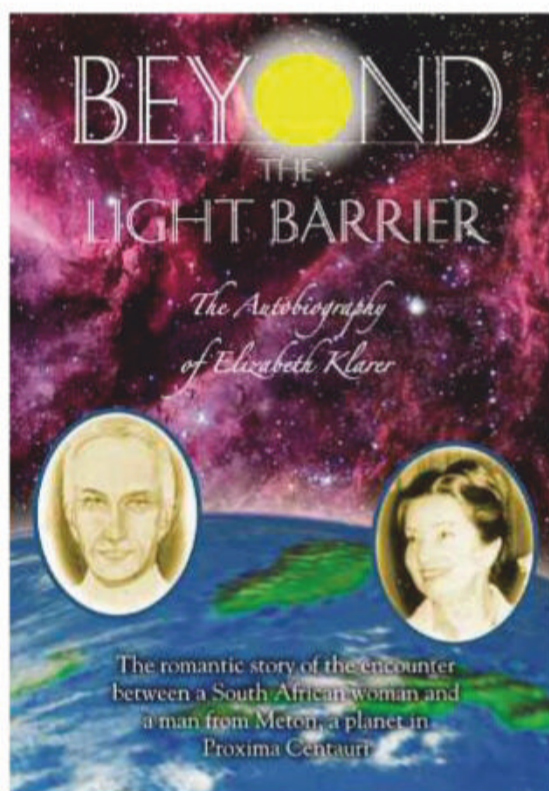
NO 49. ACROSS THE MILKY WAY WITH MILLS & BOONE

Contactees of the spacefaring 1950s vintage are, it's generally agreed, a funny lot – in both senses of the word, for many. First came George Adamski, who met Orthon from Venus in the Californian desert, and Orthon later took George on a trip to see the far side of the Moon, with its snowy mountains with timbered slopes, lakes and rivers, and a bustling city where vehicles floated through the streets. Orfeo Angelucci was taken to an unnamed planet to meet Jesus of Nazareth. Howard Menger left his wife for a spacewoman, brought back potatoes from the Moon, and made an LP of piano music 'from another planet'. Buck Nelson returned from a trip on a saucer with a mighty 385lb (175kg) pooch called Bo. Truman Bethurum met Aura Rhanes, a luscious spaceship captain of the female class who spoke perfect English – in rhyme. She and her crew came from Clarion, a planet hidden from terrestrial sight behind the Moon. Bethurum suggested she perhaps meant the Sun. There seems to have been a dearth of female contactees in the 1950s, but the best known outclassed all these blokes when it came to astonishing tales of contact. For not only did she meet an irresistibly handsome alien called Akon, she snuck off with him to his planet, outside the Solar System, and there gave birth to his son. She was South African Elizabeth Klarer, and this is her story.

Klarer is remarkably vague about dates in her book, but we've managed to fill in most of them from a profile by Lauren Beukes (<http://laurenbeukes.bookslive.co.za/blog/2010/02/19/the-woman-who-loved-an-alien/>), and there are other useful details in an uncredited article, based on a report by Edgar Sievers, in *Flying Saucer Review*, Vol 2 No 6 (Nov-Dec 1956).

Like other contactees, Elizabeth Klarer's acquaintance with flying saucers started early. She was seven years old when, with her sister, she saw her first one, and the circumstances were typically strange. "We were feeding our Sealyham puppies in the stableyard when we saw it... An enormous silvery disc swooped down toward us, moving with a changing brightness out of the clear expanse of sky – a globe of light as clear as a pearl. Fascinated, we watched it manoeuvre over us, while the puppies left their food and ran yelping into the kennel.

"Then suddenly another huge sphere fell out of the sky, rolling down toward us, glowing orange-red and rotating slowly as it came, pockmarked with craters like the Moon. A fiery and terrifying planetoid was silently and gracefully sweeping through the upper reaches of Earth's atmosphere, and as it slowly rotated, suspended on its course toward us, the silvery disc moved with a flash of light and paced beside it in a slow passage across the sky until the planetoid moved out of the Sun's rays to the north, leaving a long, thick trail like smoke



across the heavens." Klarer maintained that the huge sphere had been "a ravaging, desolate asteroid intent on a collision course and destruction", and the silvery disc had shepherded it away to save the planet. And "in that moment the vibrations of time drew aside the nebulous mists of eternity and the womb of the future revealed itself to my questing soul." As we see here, Klarer's writing was no stranger to the purple end of the prose spectrum.

A few months after this, another (or the same?) disc diverted a tornado from

the family farmhouse, pulverising a pine tree and demolishing an abandoned shed instead. Over the next 20 years Klarer matriculated, studied art and music in Florence in Italy, and spent four years studying meteorology at Cambridge University. In 1932 she went back to South Africa, married Capt. W Stafford Phillips, with whom she had a daughter, Marilyn. He taught her to fly his DH Tiger Moth. "It was glorious to move through the uncharted sky, threading a way through the depths of air, the substance of which the sky is made, where the clouds float in all their glory and the wind is the spirit of the sky's third dimension. There, the forces of magnetism permeate all matter and all life and the connection between magnetism and the mind is a reality, while in the geomagnetic field there is an affinity with the Universe, which is the source of all telepathic thought." Then, in 1937, they were flying over the Drakensberg Mountains, en route from Durban to Baragwanath when, as Beukes tells the story, "a huge pulsating sphere with a slightly raised dome pulled level with their plane... Elizabeth tapped Stafford on the back of the neck. When he looked over his shoulder to see what she was on about, he immediately launched into evasive manoeuvres, ducking and banking away. The ship paced them easily, cyclically flashing through white, blue and yellow, before it flipped on its side, rolled away like a wheel and then, with a burst of light, vanished. As soon as they landed, Stafford filed a detailed report to headquarters in Pretoria. Unfortunately, the South African Air Force has no record of it." How odd that it doesn't.

Not long after this Klarer and her husband returned to England, where he worked as a test pilot for de Havilland at Hatfield. During these pre-war years she met 'the Chief', whom she doesn't name, but who can be inferred to be Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding – saucer fan and believer in fairies. We might note here of post-Adamski American contactees that the later the contactee emerged into public view, the earlier the claimed experience. Elizabeth Klarer beat the lot of them at this, too, with her first sighting 30 years before Arnold's, although her first eyeball-to eyeball meeting with her

future lover didn't happen until December 1954. Meanwhile, in 1937 or so, Dowding was unfazed by talk of flying saucers and rather obliquely suggested she carry on her 'research', and Klarer makes it all sound quite official – "you have been thoroughly vetted" and "every detail of information must be given to me, no matter how fantastic... I want you to use your powers of extrasensory perception and follow up any hunches you may have" – in her account of Dowding's words. What Klarer was able to report during the war years she doesn't say; otherwise, she spent the time working as a meteorologist for the RAF.

By 1954, Beukes tells us, she had returned to South Africa, divorced Capt. Phillips, and remarried one Paul Klarer; they had a son, David, in 1949. Klarer again: "I prepared myself spiritually, mentally and intellectually to attain a wholeness with the Universe and tune in to the infinite... I practised telepathy with horses, dogs and cats, and even with plants, machines or anything with the electric spark of life... and eventually I was able to communicate with the man who came in the spaceship from beyond our Solar System. As time went by through the years of preparation, the telepathic link became stronger and stronger. In the understanding of universal harmony, I knew his name within my soul and I knew that he was there within the spaceship." Some of this communication appears to have occurred during out-of-body experiences.

On 27 December 1954, at about 10am, Klarer was out on a hilltop near the Natal farm in the foothills of the Drakensbergs, when the spaceship arrived. From one of its three portholes, a man looked out at her. "I looked back at him without flinching. He stood there with his arms folded across his chest, regarding me with a compelling and hypnotic attraction about his eyes that seemed to influence and control me, even at that distance... I studied his face – the most wonderful face I had ever seen – and I felt a sense of affinity and love." Klarer bottled out of hopping on board, and the saucer departed. But reflecting on the experience afterward: "A sense of fulfillment and a deep and everlasting love filled my heart for the man in the spaceship. There was no doubt in my mind that he would return – and soon." And the following April, he did. "I awoke early and knew that he was coming back... My heart answered the magnetic pull that touched my mind. The vibration came gently out of the mysterious sky with the south wind, with the tang of the sea wind as it rustled and rippled through the long grasses of the hills..." She dragged on her clothes and schlepped up Cathkin Mountain, which she now called Flying Saucer Hill. There at the top was the silvery disc, and a man standing tall beside it. "In that wonderful moment I didn't hesitate, but ran down the rough slope, straight to the man beside his ship. Within seconds I was at his side. Laughing gaily, he caught me round the waist and swung me up on to the hull of



ABOVE: Elizabeth with a bust of Akon.

"FROM THE
MOMENT I
PICKED UP
YOUR BOOK
UNTIL I PUT IT
DOWN, I WAS
CONVULSED
WITH LAUGH-
TER. SOME DAY
I INTEND
READING IT."

Groucho Marx

his ship. We both laughed as though it was the most natural thing in the world. Then he spoke to me in precise English and his voice was like a caress.

"Not afraid this time?"

"Holding me close in his arms, he smiled gently as I looked up into his kind grey eyes.

"I have known your face within my heart all my life," I answered.

"I am not from any place on this planet called Earth," he whispered with his lips in my hair."

Cue violins, *crescendo*. "Gathering me into his arms, he kissed me on the lips. A magical, electric current seemed to fuse us together in an eternity of ecstasy. In that moment, I knew that the art of love was of the mind and soul, not only of the body... My soul was enraptured by his nearness and spellbound by his eyes, his gentle but compelling eyes." Mills & Boon, indeed.

Akon takes Klarer to visit his mothership, where after a delicious meat-free meal, she watches "electric mirages" (some kind of holographic projection) of Earth, the Sun in close-up, and Akon's home planet. It turns

out that his people originated on Venus; anticipating a massive solar flare that killed off life there, they moved to Earth and Mars; and foreseeing another – which wiped out the dinosaurs – left a remnant under the Antarctic ice and settled on Meton in the Alpha Centauri system. Then he's off to Lyra to do some research, and she has to go home – but not before he has promised that next time he'll take her home and "sow the seed of my love within your delicate body". There is also page upon page of pseudo-scientific jabberwocky that purports to explain how Metonian spaceships overcome the speed of light, that light (and its 'micro-atoms') and love are the driving forces of creation, and how on Meton electrical power (which powers everything) is "tapped from the atmosphere". There is much mention of 'vibrations' and 'dimensions'. Klarer is deposited back on Cathkin Mountain. Cue purple: "And then they were gone, in a flash of brilliant light, back into the fathomless seas of space and away beyond the light barrier, where the uncharted void of timelessness rules the destiny of planets."

A while later (about 1958), after adventures with Akon and the Air Force, he returned and took her – and her MG saloon – to his spaceship. Where she enjoyed a delightful bath; and Akon arrived as she was standing naked, brushing her hair. "My beloved, my life," Akon whispered again and again, as I surrendered in ecstasy to the magic of his lovemaking. Our bodies merged in magnetic union as the divine essence of our spirits became one, and in doing so I became whole" (and so on into the ultra-violet). Inevitably, Akon has a didactic moment: "The true purpose of mating is not only for the reproduction of offspring, but to retain and satisfy opposite forces of electricity so that these elements may fuse and retain nature's balance between the sexes." So now we know.

Things get odder, for Klarer spends nine years on Meton, supposedly bringing up her son by Akon, although she says little about the lad but much about how wonderful life is there. One has a powerful impression that she thinks humanity, on Earth, is nasty, brutish, obnoxious, and doomed. But when eventually she returns to rejoin her toxic brethren, a mere four months have passed. Her son has no memory of this absence. She goes to meet Akon once again but is thwarted by Russians who land in a rocket and take a pot-shot at her with a death ray.

This is a truly weird book, but a must-have for the discriminating forteen: partly for its revelation of the misanthropy that informs a certain strand of New Agery, partly for the entertainment of its interludes of non-science, its startling prose style, and its outrageous story. What has caused it to be neglected is why it deserves attention.

Elizabeth Klarer, *Beyond the Light Barrier*, Howard Timmins, 1980/Light Technology, 2008 (with afterword by David Klarer).

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Manimal, hoax or something else?

Encounters with the large hairy man carrying a dead animal – often including foul smells, odd noises and fireballs in the sky – are among the most memorable from a period of high strangeness

Momo

The Strange Case of the Missouri Monster

Lyle Blackburn

LegendScape Publishing 2019

Pb, 178pp, illus, ind, \$14.95, ISBN 9780578456799

Growing up in 1970s rural Texas, musician and author Lyle Blackburn's imagination was stirred by books and films about Bigfoot and other cryptozoological oddities. All his work in literature and film, which includes *The Beast of Boggy Creek* (2012), a history of the now-legendary sightings of an ape-like creature in and around Fouke, Arkansas (filmed as *The Legend of Boggy Creek* in 1972), and *Beyond Boggy Creek* (2017), a follow-up book on other Southern creatures, is essentially nostalgic. They are an attempt to pay tribute to these now-classic monsters and to recapture that feeling of childlike wonder.

Blackburn intended including the Momo (Missouri Monster) incident in *Beyond Boggy Creek*, but the fact that the area isn't the American South (it's the southeastern Midwest) prevented its inclusion. Instead, he has devoted an entire book, *Momo: The Strange Case of the Missouri Monster*, to the creature. Sightings in the summer of 1972 in the small town of Louisiana in northeastern Missouri resulted in local panic. Hunting posses irritated local law enforcement, and media attention gave birth to a short-lived local tourist industry. Joan Mills and Mary Ryan first reported Momo, a seven-foot tall, smelly, hairy humanoid creature with a large, pumpkin-shaped head, in 1971. The sighting on 11 July 1972 by two children in their backyard at the base of Marzolf

Hill, on the western edge of the town, initiated the two-month-long flap. They reported seeing a large, hairy, man-like creature speckled with blood, who appeared to be carrying a dead dog or goat (or possibly its offspring, as Blackburn reports). Additional encounters followed throughout July and August, before tapering off. These were often accompanied by a "strong garbage smell", ringing sounds, growls and yelps, and strange lights ('fireballs') that came out of the sky above Marzolf Hill and fell in the woods. A search there turned up an abandoned building permeated by a strange, foul odour, in which was found a large nest. In some ways, the Momo incident is similar to Mothman, another creature encounter that occurred along with a variety of other fortean phenomena, including strange lights in the sky and UFO sightings. Both occurred during that wonderful, colourful mid-1960s to mid-70s period of high strangeness, in otherwise unexceptional, off-the-beaten-path river towns.

In previous books, and in his latest, Blackburn shows himself to be a capable researcher. He tracks down historical newspapers and other records, and collects new interviews with eyewitnesses and others involved in order to present as complete a history as possible. He presents his evidence in a clear, straightforward, engaging, yet casual manner. Blackburn also includes a helpful chronology of the sightings; a timeline is included among the various appendixes, along with maps, web links, and photos. There are provocative detours into local Native American folklore about a race of hairy humanoids who descended from the sky; the 19th

"A hoax seems more likely than an out-of-place bear or an interdimensional visitor"

century 'Blue Man'; a wild man spotted by European settlers in and around Louisiana; and local encounters with Bigfoot. There's also a rather specious claim of a Minnesota Iceman-like fairground ape man said – by a single witness – to have made its way around Louisiana in 1964, four years before the appearance of the famous Iceman (and which we can probably assume was the Iceman).

Blackburn lays out the evidence for Momo and examines a number of potential explanations. Was the creature an extraterrestrial visitor or a Keelian interdimensional being... or – more prosaically – a bear or a well-orchestrated hoax? Bears are not native to northeastern Missouri, but one was sighted near Louisiana just a month before Momo's 1971 appearance. Blackburn allows that southern bears could make their way north along the Mississippi River. Numerous witnesses described the monster as 'bear-like' despite its apparent bipedalism. The distance between the creature and eyewitnesses, misidentifications, and the hysteria in the summer of 1972 may have led to less-than-accurate perceptions of the creature's identity. Similarly, the mysterious lights were often seen near railroad crossings and were witnessed at regular intervals;

in one instance, two 'apple-sized' lights appeared to "signal back and forth". Blackburn fails to consider that lights at railroad crossings might exhibit similar properties and behaviour. He suggests that if Momo is not a man-like ape (or ape-like man), then the most probable explanation, given the evidence, is that this was a hoax. While the hoax theory cannot explain close-up encounters, strange odours or sounds, in Blackburn's weighing of the evidence, a hoax

seems more likely than an out-of-place bear or an extraterrestrial or interdimensional visitor.

There are other minor drawbacks to Blackburn's book, including some subject/verb and tense agreements and other

grammatical errors. The index is woefully incomplete. Finally, at only 132 pages, and with several lengthy, nearly superfluous digressions (the Iceman red herring, in particular), the book is fairly slight. One is left with the impression that, whatever Blackburn's feelings on the matter, Momo does perhaps not entirely deserve a book-length treatment. Nevertheless, Blackburn's ability to convey the strange atmosphere of this bygone era, his "feet-on-the-ground" approach to research and his enthusiasm for his subject are the book's greatest strengths and, for the most part, make up for its weaknesses.

The Momo sightings are among the most memorable of the high strangeness era. If, as LP Hartley says, the past is a foreign country, what then can we really know of the impenetrable woods of these lonely and distant places?

Eric Hoffman

★★★★★



Being Neolithic

A fine book illustrates the Neolithic's big picture developments with convincing details

Neolithic Britain

The Transformation of Social Worlds

Keith Ray & Julian Thomas

Oxford University Press 2018
Hb, 416pp, illus, £30.00, ISBN 9780198823896

Ray and Thomas's *Neolithic Britain* is one of many recently published British (Isles) prehistoric books, published slightly before Bradley's incomparable *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland* (2nd ed).

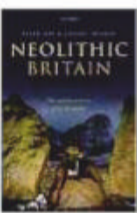
Both are well produced, fact-packed and read well. In addition, *Neolithic Britain* is furnished with many carefully chosen, excellent colour plates including a superbly atmospheric dust cover (many photographs are taken by the justifiably ubiquitous Adam Stanford) and fine line drawings.

They differ in important respects (both cover the start and, with the influx of the fecund Beaker Folk, the ending of the Neolithic), but Bradley forges onwards until 'the ending of Prehistory' aka the coming of the Romans. A more significant difference is how the new field data are treated by the three authors, all well and highly regarded/respected archaeological grandees. Bradley is both more guarded, yet more inclusive in his discussion of these new data but also is the more conventional, though even for him facts are now knitted into themes (memes, even) rather than woven into a straightforward Whiggish-fashion temporal narrative – stone (fairly new, but very fashionable), copper, bronze, iron, SPQR. In British archaeological writing, the inexorable march of history has been paused, its actors have been given a pitstop to allow them to sit around the

eternal rectangular hearth, perhaps to engage in ritual feasting with eyes on the past and blind to their future.

For the more polemical, Ray and Thomas 'becoming Neolithic' is centred around 'a sense of collective identity' and 'continuity through time' as expressed by the circulation of (treasured) artefacts, the creation and use of ceremonial space and of shared traditions; an 'investing' in past times and specific places.

This new way of thinking led to herding of livestock and cultivation of cereals and becoming sedentary, rather



than being the result of it. For the authors those are the key changes as they neatly subvert the traditional concept of the "Neolithic revolution".

Indeed, the concept of a Neolithic thought-collective has an almost Childe-like appeal.

Whilst such broad themes imbue the book, they are illustrated/demonstrated by excellent specifics.

Classic areas and sites are described and discussed in decent detail (a very succinct vignette of the Stonehenge Landscape is typical), almost all with germane figures and photographs. Alongside these are full expositions of lesser known, but for the authors, critical sites, notably Dorstone Hill in Herefordshire. Hence the book can be read just for its trees, ignoring dark shades in the wood.

This is a really attractive, well-paced, current book (an increasingly difficult task this last half decade) and though it may turn out to be of its time in terms of its broad interpretations and concerns, it is a jolly good, novel read, full of well-dated, timeless data.

For a treat go and buy both books.

Rob Ixer

★★★★★

The UFO People

A Curious Culture

MJ Baniyas

August Night Books 2019
Pb, 181pp, \$17.99, ISBN 9781786770912

For all the calumny heaped on ufologists over the seven decades of their presence in our midst (particularly wound-up debunkers have pegged them as nothing less than menaces to the civilised order), they are mostly an unremarkable lot, not all that distinguishable from your neighbours. In fact, some of them *are* your neighbours. It is emphatically untrue, as MJ Baniyas puts it in a momentary lapse into his own wild hyperbole, that the UFO subculture is "much more fascinating" than UFOs themselves. Ufologists may be more curiously inclined than most, and perhaps better able to function even as the prospect of ridicule, immediate or potential, circles them like an angry hornet. Otherwise, in my lifelong experience of both ufologists and watering holes, they're less eccentric or unhinged than your average barstool ranter.

Of course, 'ufologists' answer to no single definition. The notion of a 'UFO community', or even of a single entity known as 'ufology', is a sentimental fiction. Individuals are drawn to UFOs for many reasons, as often as not conflicting ones, ranging from scientific to conspiratorial to occult-religious and all points between. Many arrive in answer to just a naïve fancy for novelty. The UFO-engaged do, however, tend to cluster in sub-groups that mirror their own priorities and approaches. In my own case it was the Center for UFO Studies, founded by astronomer and Blue Book consultant J Allen Hynek as a shelter for UFOphiles with graduate degrees.

The UFO People is less about aliens than about the purely human UFO-focused. There have been other informative, fair-minded treatments of the subject (most famously, political scientist Jodi Dean's *Aliens in America*, 1998). But in this case, the author, an educator who lives in Manitoba, is an active ufologist and onetime MUFON field investigator. Baniyas's book seems something of

an extension of Dean's.

It's not easy to review, however, because its core argument – that ufology lies in a state of marginality relative to mainstream culture in the way that UFOs do to the ideology of science – wanders in and out of the text. A related contention is that ufologists are more radical than they think they are. After all, they embrace a boundaries-crushing phenomenon that, metaphorically and maybe even in some sense literally, carries elements of both the real and the imagined. Thus, efforts to tackle the issue solely via current science or even 'common sense' may short-circuit inquiry before it gets anywhere.

Inasmuch as I tend to concur, I do not dispute Baniyas's intellectual framework. I do have a quarrel with his UFO history, which unfortunately embraces the unkillable canard that the Shaver mystery either created flying saucers or generated the extraterrestrial hypothesis. In fact, as press accounts from the summer of 1947 (in which Shaver's demented claims are never mentioned) document unambiguously, it was Fortean Society members who alerted journalists to the prior history of anomalous aerial phenomena. As *FT* readers know, Charles Fort attributed them to visitors from space. Oddly, though Fort was the original UFO person, he appears nowhere in *The UFO People*. Worse, Baniyas credits Donald Keyhoe (31 years after *Book of the Damned*) as having treated UFOs as spacecraft "for the first time" anywhere. Even without Fort, this is an inaccurate representation.

These irritations aside, this book has its virtues. Unlike many authors of UFO books *pro* or *con*, Baniyas is smart and thoughtful, blessed with sophisticated insights into some basic realities concerning the place of UFOs in culture and their appeal to some and revulsion to others.

The chapter on the slippery Richard Doty (still a prime suspect in the MJ-12 hoax, though he has denied guilt for decades, persuading approximately nobody) highlights the most purely entertaining chapter. There, Baniyas recounts his entirely unrevealing interaction with the man, who – teeth clenched,





exasperation manifest – he concedes is, to all appearances, a perfectly nice guy.

Another chapter considers the plight of well-credentialed scientists involved in the study of UFO-related effects on persons (in Baniyas’s words) “physically and objectively injured by something that doesn’t exist.” He means this ironically, of course, and does not intend to propose that UFOs will go away if we pretend they aren’t there. But what we do with them remains a conundrum *The UFO People* seeks to address in occasionally uneven but usually interesting fashion.

Jerome Clark

★★★★★

The Men on Magic Carpets

Searching for the Superhuman Sports Star

Ed Hawkins

Bloomsbury Sport 2019

Hb, 296pp, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781472942593

Sports writer and journalist Ed Hawkins nips here into that niche area where fortune and professional sport meet.

During the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union shared a belief that Superhumans could win the War through “boggle-eyed mind control and controlling the occult”. In the UK, Halifax Town employed an illusionist, Ronald Markham, to hypnotise their team to beat Man City. They did, but Markham next drove his car blindfolded into a police car that should not have been there... Mike Murphy, golf coach founder of the Esalen Institute, wrote about *siddhis*, listing “the largest inventory of extraordinary human potential”. He was one of many on both sides researching shamans, witch doctors and yogis for clues, but he saw the prize as sport, not warfare.

Wonderful tales make this enjoyable for the most sports-averse of us. Shame he didn’t call it *The Men who Stare at Goals*.

William Darragh

★★★★★

The review of *Cryptid* in issue 382 was by Jerry Glover, not Jerome Clark. Apologies to both of them.

The making of a monster

The Jersey Devil went viral after a 1909 flap, ratcheted up by hoax press stories, but this history of the red-eyed monster is about more than that

The Secret History of the Jersey Devil

How Quakers, Hucksters, and Benjamin Franklin Created a Monster

Brian Regal & Frank J Esposito

Johns Hopkins University Press 2018

Pb, 160pp, illus, notes, ind, \$18.95, ISBN 9781421436357

Everyone knows the Jersey Devil, which has long been one of the most famous cryptids in the United States, if not the world. Many also know one of two stories about the Devil. Those with an interest in folklore likely know of its origins as the Leeds Devil, supposedly born to a Mother Leeds who cursed, “Let this one be a devil!” during labour, and thus released into the world a red-eyed, bat-winged creature that flew up the chimney and out into the wilderness of the Pine Barrens. Those with an interest in the paranormal are more likely to know of the 1909 flap of sightings, which birthed a wave of mass hysteria stoked by newspapermen and hucksters, leading to the suspicion that there might be a real animal generating all those sightings.

Few know the whole story of the Jersey Devil, however. Brian Regal and Frank J Esposito’s *The Secret History of the Jersey Devil* should help rectify that.

A thorough dissection of the American monster, their book is a fascinating look at almost every aspect of the Devil, but their focus is on its origins. Here they not only untangle the various major threads that were braided into the Devil’s biography, but also uncover the many murkier, more nebulous components that go into the gradual generation of a monster legend.

These include the expectation by European settlers of finding monsters

in the New World, the unsettling feelings the desolate wild can engender, the native Americans’ belief in forest spirits and, later, mysterious clues in search of explanations, such as what appeared to be hoof prints in new-fallen snow atop rooftops.

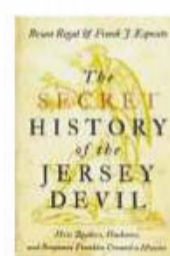
The Leeds/Jersey Devil’s birth is usually assigned to the early 18th century. Regal and Esposito look a full century further back to 17th century England and the birth of Daniel Leeds, who later converted to Quakerism and emigrated to New Jersey, where he became a prominent and influential member of the community.

When he attempted to publish an almanac including astrological and occult material, however, he had a falling out with his co-religionists, though “falling out” might be too mild a term to describe what quickly escalated to a life-long war of words waged in almanacs, books and other writings.

After Leeds’s death, his son Titan continued the family almanac, and though he fought far less with Quakers, he became a target of a young Benjamin Franklin, who continued to link the Leeds family with astrology and the supernatural in his own almanacs, albeit parodically.

Apparently, decades of being called a Devil or Devil-worshipper stuck somewhere in the local psyche, so even though Daniel Leeds’s name was left out of the legend in favour of a fictional Captain or Mother Leeds and/or various preachers and witches and sea captains, the Devil bore his surname.

By 1905, the modern version of the story was cemented in a *Trenton Times* article, and within a matter of a few years, a popular imagination primed by tales of the UK’s Spring-heeled Jack and various hoaxes from the Cardiff Giant to the Feejee Mermaid was



ready to receive the Devil as a real living, breathing modern monster.

It was, Regal and Esposito explain, a trio of men associated with Philadelphia’s Ninth and Arch Street Dime Museum who saw the legend of the Leeds Devil in a newspaper, and began to plant hoax stories of sightings in the papers.

These stories begat still more sightings from readers. The culmination was a staged hunt and the exhibition of the “real” Devil at the museum – a kangaroo with painted stripes and fake wings housed in a dark cage.

By that time, however, the museum men’s story was too strong for them to control. Like Frankenstein’s monster, it rebelled and escaped. Whatever became of the poor kangaroo, The Jersey Devil became immortal, and lives on.

While tracing the centuries-long story, the authors go on brief excursions into a plethora of other subjects, exploring them quickly but thoroughly. While the book is primarily a history of the Jersey Devil, it is also at other times a history of monsters, of colonial era politics, of pamphleteering and almanac publishing, of hoaxes, of 20th century cryptozoology and of pop culture’s relationship to a legend that became a craze that became a mainstay.

Yes, everyone knows the Jersey Devil and a story or two about it, and anyone who reads Regal and Esposito’s *Secret History* will learn all of the other stories about the beast and their background... or, at least, all of those that have been told so far. After all, this Devil isn’t in danger of disappearing any time soon.

It was made of sterner stuff than that.

J Caleb Mozzocco

★★★★★

Transformative beliefs

Shapeshifters come in all shapes and sizes, as this history of animals, entities and humans transmogrifying into other forms suggests

Shapeshifters

A History

John B Kachuba

Reaktion Books 2019

Hb, 200pp, illus, bib, ind, £16.00, ISBN 9781789140798

For this reader, ‘shapeshifter’ initially suggested werewolves and vampires, and indeed two of this book’s 10 chapters focus on these subjects. But the author has taken a broader approach, opening with the well-known Palaeolithic cave painting ‘The Sorcerer’, which supposedly depicts a shaman transforming into a deer.

Ancient Egyptian and Greek myth, the Bible, and European folk beliefs are all discussed. We read of various types of Celtic fairies – *kelpies* (water-horses), *selkies* (seal-people), and *pucas*, who may appear as rabbits, dogs, goats (or mongooses?).

Europe elsewhere is also rich in shapeshifters. The *lange wapper* lurks in Antwerp’s canals; its long spindly legs let it walk on water, but it has no set form, sometimes, like Dr Johnson’s bulldog, being as small as a mouse; at other times as tall as a building. Sicily’s *doñas de fuera* fairies are beautiful creatures, but have hooves or paws, and may appear as cats. The Loire valley’s *fayettes* are sometimes seen as moles. The Romanian or Bulgarian *zmeu* is a dragon who can shift into human form; and Russia’s forest-dwelling *leshy* resembles a tall man with pale skin and green eyes. Although his hooves, horns and tail made from vines all hint at his ability to adopt the form of any plant or tree.

Further afield, the demonic *rakshasa* of Hindu myth appear in their natural form as ugly, deformed humans with

claw-like fingernails, long tongues, and fangs. Able to transform into virtually any form they choose, at night they take to the air, hunting for prey, sometimes manifesting as a beautiful woman, the better to seduce and devour careless men. In this respect they may be compared with *kitsune*, magical foxes, an important aspect of Japanese shapeshifting lore (originally derived from China and Korea).



Japan also has its *tanuki* or raccoon dog; one curious legend has *tanuki* transforming into steam trains.

Central America is a rich source of shapeshifter lore. *Nagual* are witches who typically adopt the form of pumas or jaguars; Mexico’s La Chusa is a witch who takes the form of an owl – clearly a popular transformation, since Florida’s Seminole tell of a supernatural, humanoid owl, the *stikini*, whilst in the southwestern US, the Apache have their very own Big Owl Man. Shades of John Keel’s Mothman. Elsewhere in Native American tradition, the *Diné* (Navajo) skinwalker is a shaman with the ability to transform into an owl, but also a crow, coyote, fox, wolf, or pretty much anything it likes.

Might Norse berserkers be deemed shapeshifters? Did the act of donning wolf- or bear-skin allow them to adopt the ferocity and strength of those animals? A modern parallel is drawn with combatants in Sierra Leone’s



A woodland Slavic shapeshifter (leshy), by II Brodskii, 1906

and Liberian civil wars. Mende fighters spoke of ‘heating up’ the heart to become someone else, capable of great courage and great cruelty. Journalist Sebastian Junger described them as “the most terrifying human

beings I’ve ever encountered.” A Kalahari Bushman healer’s first-hand account explains how, during ritual dances, he becomes a lion, and what this feels like: “I feel pain and start to cry... Fur grows out of my skin and claws grow from my hands.” Participants in the ritual apparently witness this too.

The shapeshifting concept is alive and well in David Icke’s ‘reptilian elite’ theory; lizard-like, flesh-eating aliens from the Alpha Draconis star system have apparently infiltrated all levels of world government, business and entertainment, cunningly disguised as humans. After the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attacks, a journalist interviewing Parisian Muslims was startled to hear one young man explain the atrocities as the work of “magical Jews”, a “hybrid race of shape-shifters”.

Another way to consider shapeshifting through a modern lens is to consider contemporary theories of gender fluidity. Not simply a 21st century Western preoccupation, various trans antecedents from around the world are attested: Native American *berdache* or ‘two-spirit’ people, Aboriginal Australian *jandu* women who performed male roles, cross-dressing in Japanese kabuki theatre...

Whilst gender-shifting seems relevant to the book’s overall theme, some material appears to have been added primarily to increase the page count. Is cosplay really a form of shapeshifting? Some of the Biblical references seemed tenuous – Nebuchadnezzar as possible werewolf; the Holy Ghost’s descent as a dove. A chapter dedicated to shapeshifters in popular culture also seemed superfluous, and the brief index is of limited use, with several omissions. Overall though, a thorough survey of shapeshifters worldwide, past and present.

Christopher Josiffe

★★★★★

The Pit and the Pendulum and Other Tales

Edgar Allan Poe; Ed: David Van Leer

Oxford University Press 2018

Hb, 338pp, bib, chron, notes, £14.99, ISBN 9780198827290



Whether you believe Poe to be justly associated with visionaries such as Nathaniel Hawthorne or Hermann Melville, or among the skilled technicians of the supernatural short story, one cannot doubt his literary perennialism.

This volume contains no surprises and many favourites – ‘Ligeia’, ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ and ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’, to name but three.

Van Leer’s introduction throws light upon the problematic position Poe occupied in 19th century literary life as he reminds us of the unpalatable behaviour and questionable family life that for many define Poe’s celebrity. Whether one enjoys a well sculpted tale of psychological or physical dread, or is appreciative of Poe’s unique subjectivity, Van Leer stresses the sacrosanct nature of his writing for many writers and philosophers to follow.

For the Symbolists, Surrealists and the heavyweight thinkers of French literary theory, Barthes and Lacan, Poe stands alongside Freud as a magus of the unconscious drive and the reign of the Id.

The select bibliography may also suggest how a new generation of writers – PoMo-savvy and working within the New Weird genre – remain indebted to his spectral insights.

The 24 tales from the 1902 ‘Virginia’ edition present newcomers to Poe’s incredible tales of otherness and remind existing readers of his significance across the broader spectrum of American and European writing, and critical theory.

With scholarly annotations and bibliography, an informative introduction and useful chronology, Oxford University Press has produced a highly attractive volume suitable for all species of reader.

Chris Hill

★★★★★



The SF and fantasy round-up

David V Barrett on the power of dreams (or unreliable memory?); a thriller about fortune fave, the Antikythera machine; near-future subversion; global calamities; and two graphic novels

The Heavens

Sandra Newman

Granta 2019

Hb, 257pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781783784844

The Crying Machine

Greg Chivers

HarperVoyager 2019

Hb, 292pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780008308773

Zero Bomb

MT Hill

Titan 2019

Pb, 303pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781789090017

The Migration

Helen Marshall

Titan 2019

Pb, 389pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781789091342

Is This How You See Me?

Jaime Hernandez

Fantagraphics Books 2019

Hb, 90pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781683961826

Tonta

Jaime Hernandez

Fantagraphics Books 2019

Hb, 100pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781683962052

All her life, Kate has had dreams set in an earlier time, dreams that feel very real. Now, in New York in 2000, she gets together with Ben at a penthouse party – and her dreams start to become literally life-changing. She dreams that she is Emelia Lanier, who meets a struggling poet called Will in the late 16th-century; awake in the 21st century Kate finds little mention of him. In her dreams Emelia has apocalyptic visions of burnt-out cities; she knows she has to do something – and each time Kate wakes the world

has changed. Alternate chapters are from Ben's viewpoint, as he struggles to cope with a girlfriend who remembers the Green Party President Chen, not President Bush, and a world with no wars. In an echo of the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi on butterflies, Kate-as-16th-century-Emilia wonders: "Perhaps this was the only world, Perhaps Kate was the dream." Is Sandra Newman's *The Heavens* about parallel worlds, or time travel, or the frightening power of dreams, or schizophrenia, or the unreliability of memory – or all of these? A beautifully written, often deeply troubling novel.

In a Jerusalem half-destroyed by war and teeming with rival religious groups (nothing new there!), the Minister of Antiquities recruits a small-time crook and a newly arrived strange young woman with impressive IT-interface skills to set up a theft from the city's museum: the Antikythera Mechanism. As all fortune tellers know, this lump of fused metal fished out of the sea in 1901 is an ancient Greek analogue computer, its 30-plus gears forming a complex astronomical calendar. But in Greg Chivers's *The Crying Machine* it has a deeper power, a malevolent life of its own, making it a powerful weapon that various factions want to get their hands on. Reminiscent in some ways of Ian McDonald's *The Dervish House*, this is a very nicely written religious, political, cultural and technological thriller.

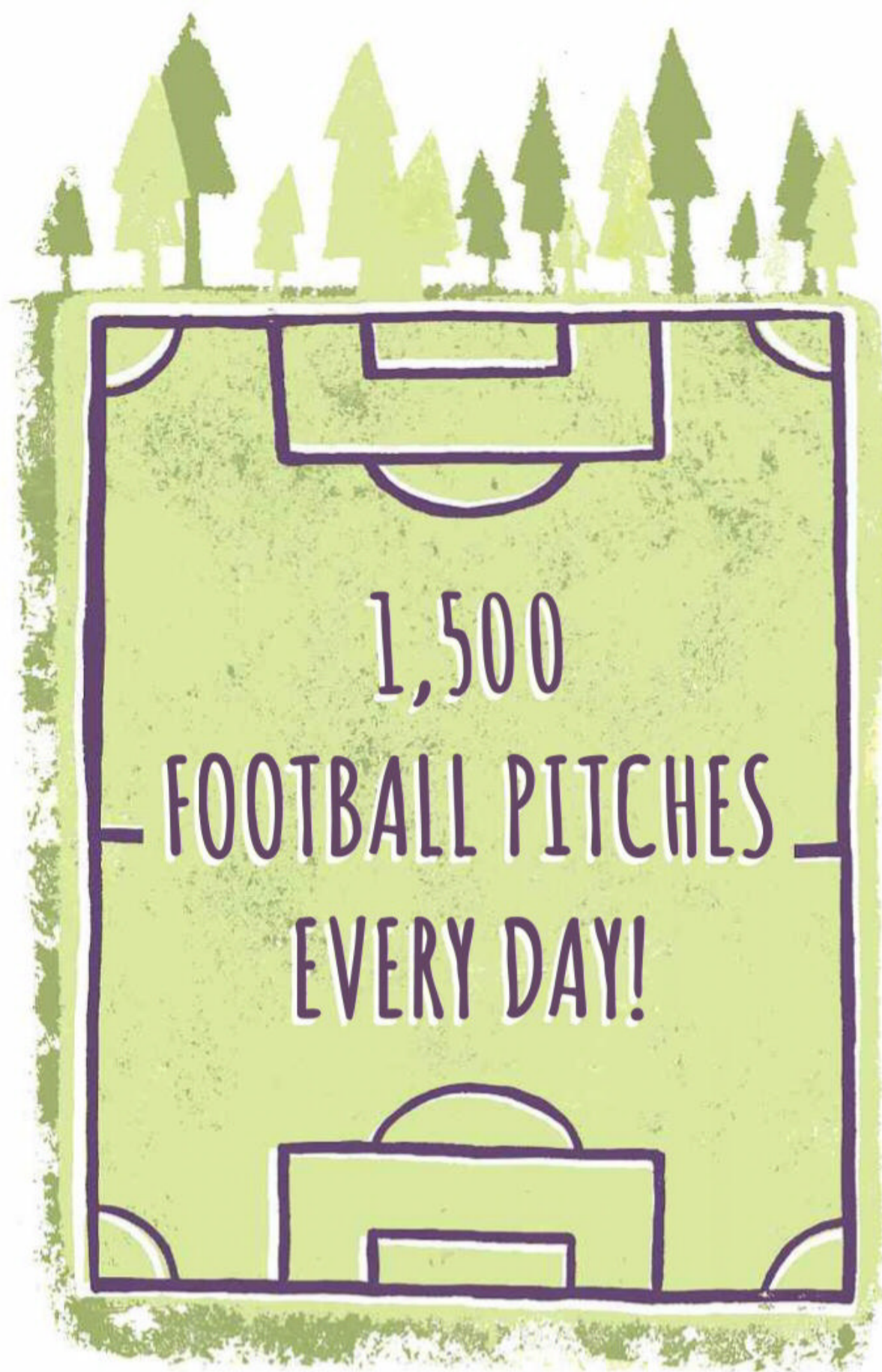
In a near-future Britain, Remi, a bicycle courier, is recruited by a subversive group which aims to reduce our dependence on technology. Their actions lead up to the Zero Bomb of the title of MT Hill's novel, turning off the electricity in a major city. Remi's story is intriguing, disturbing,

puzzling, as he is tracked by a fox (which turns out to be a cyborg) that brings him messages and leads him to the leader of the subversives. Remi believes his daughter Martha is dead, but is told she's alive, and that he can see her again if he joins them. Martha works for a collective growing artificial limbs on an allotment; again, because it's one person's story told at some length, it holds the attention. But the rest of the novel is messier. The second part is 35 pages of excerpts from an old dystopian novel by the subversives' leader; unfortunately it's clichéd and (presumably deliberately) badly written. Two other parts are extracts from government files, as fascinating as they sound. It's a great scenario – but it could have been more satisfying if it had focused more on Remi and Martha.

Two calamities are hitting Earth at the same time in Helen Marshall's *The Migration*: the weather is getting worse and worse, and a mystery illness is killing teenagers. In the midst of her parent's breakup Sophie leaves everyone she knows in Toronto to come to Oxford with her mother and younger sister, who has the anti-immune disease. Her aunt, a professor of historical epidemiology, finds links between today's mystery epidemic and the Black Death, and Sophie becomes fascinated by the parallels. But then film emerges of a dead teenager's body twitching and apparently coming back to life. When the authorities decide that all victims must be cremated, Sophie kidnaps her sister's body from the hospital morgue. Compellingly written, *The Migration* is a fascinating and powerful tale of humanity's transformation into something else, as nature attempts to reset the balance of the harm we've wreaked on her.

No comics explore screwed-up love lives and dysfunctional families better than *Love and Rockets*. One of two new graphic novels from Jaime Hernandez features Maggie, whom fans first met as a punk teenage mechanic nearly four decades ago, and who is now middle-aged but no less confused. *Is This How You See Me?* has Maggie and her old love Hopey leaving their partners for a weekend to go back to their old town of Huerta for a punk reunion. There are new bands there, and new kids, and even new threats, and it's a fraught time for Maggie and Hopey as they try to both recapture and perhaps redefine their old friendship. The story is interspersed with flashback scenes in 1979 and 1980 when the two are 14 or 15; the contrast between their young punk years and their mid-life reality today is poignant.

The other collection, *Tonta* (Spanish for dumb or stupid), features a slightly goofy and naïve but good-hearted teenager, and her family and schoolfriends. There's a touch of magic realism in Tonta's friend, derided by the other girls as the Gorgon, who lives wild and free as a sort of forest spirit on a wooded hill observing life in the town below. There are connections between Tonta's family and previous stories about Maggie and her circle; one of Tonta's half-sisters is the sexy but self-centred and foul-mouthed Vivian, known as Frogmouth, who we've seen over the last few years having flings with both Maggie and her current partner Ray. The story that develops through the book about street gangs and murder is confusing to Tonta, who is more focused on her friends and favourite bands and her skateboard. As so often with *Love and Rockets* stories, what seems simple on the surface is deeply multi-layered.



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Mission to Mars

A Scandinavian sci-fi thriller derived from an epic poem is an odd proposition, but this blending of the poetic and the prosaic offers a powerful cautionary tale about the fragility of human life



Aniara

Dir Pella Kågerman and Hugo Lilja, Sweden/Denmark 2018
In cinemas and digital platforms from 30 August

The *Aniara* is one of many transport ships taking refugees from Earth, which has been rendered uninhabitable by climate change, to their new homes on Mars. Shortly into the journey *Aniara* moves off its course to avoid colliding with space debris; during the incident the nuclear reactor is damaged and all the ship's fuel has to be ditched to prevent meltdown. Unable to steer back, the ship can do nothing but drift along its new path. What should have been a journey of three weeks threatens to become an endurance test of perhaps two years until the crew can execute a gravitational slingshot around a celestial body

In one sense, the film is not unlike a disaster movie in space

to put the ship back on course.

Based on an epic poem by Nobel Prize-winning author Harry Martinson, which was inspired by his anxiety about the Cold War and nuclear weapons, the film is a skilful blend of the prosaic and the poetic. One side of the story concentrates on the gradual decay of the ship, the passengers and the resources while the other focuses on abstract notions such as memory, hope and despair. The coming together of these two elements occurs in the sequences set in the ship's MIMA facility.

MIMA, overseen by the central character MR (Emelie Jonsson), is a semi-sentient computer that can access human memories to create soothing images of the past for the passengers fearful of the future and pining for what they have lost. At first, the passengers seem more interested in the bars and restaurants on board but as the situation unfolds their anxieties become greater and demand for MIMA soars.

There is a very interesting mix of ideas and influences at work in *Aniara*. In one sense, it's not unlike a disaster movie in space, like a futuristic version of one of the *Airport* films. You know the score: a huge plot device threatens everyone on board and the film tracks how each of the main characters reacts to that situation, with a twist thrown in occasionally to spice up the brew. But in another way,

Aniara is reminiscent of more cerebral efforts, like Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. There's even a hint of the mainstream about it; I'm thinking particularly of the recent Jennifer Lawrence-Chris Pratt vehicle, *Passengers*.

That said, this a very good film in its own right. It works as a sci-fi thriller and as an examination of the human psyche under pressure. Underpinning those elements is a tender, unconventional love story involving MR and one of the ship's pilots, Isagel (Bianca Cruzeiro), which is delicately observed. But it works most powerfully as a cautionary tale about underestimating the fragility of human existence, particularly our stubbornness in truly getting a grip on ecological disasters. As a matter of course, then, the overall tone of *Aniara* is bleak – remarkably so, in fact; but you should not let that prevent you from seeing it. It delivers an important message in a gripping and powerful way.

Daniel King



Werewolf

Dir Adrian Panek, Poland/Netherlands/Germany 2018
On UK release from 20 September

If you only see one Polish werewolf movie this year, make sure it's this one! Seriously, the title is something of a con because there's nothing supernatural about this film whatsoever; I feel it's my duty as a film critic to point this out to werewolf aficionados who might otherwise rock up expecting full Moons and transformation scenes.

What it is, in fact, is a WWII thriller in the vein of those people-in-peril films where folks

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

I Trapped the Devil

Dir Josh Lobo, US 2019

Available on digital platforms from 21 Oct

Here Comes Hell

Jack McHenry, UK 2019

Available on digital platforms from 11 Nov

Come to Daddy

Dir Ant Timpson, New Zealand/Canada/US 2019

DVD and digital release date TBC

Genre films frustrate some filmgoers because they are, well... generic. I must have seen 100 films which start with a car breaking down outside a spooky, storm-battered house, for example. Yet film makers occasionally get a chance to inject something new into the mix. Left-field stuff can leave some audiences cold or might, ironically, set off a new endlessly repeatable story-trend. So, we're looking at three new chillers this month that at least have the balls to do things a little differently. Each was recently screened at the annual Frightfest, and will receive wider releases later this year.

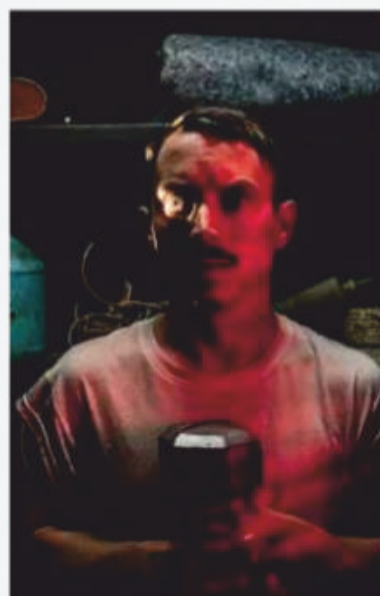
First up we get the high-concept horror of *I Trapped The Devil*, where a Christmas family reunion turns proper awkward when sketchy brother Steve insists he's trapped Satan in the basement. Is the whispering man down there an innocent kidnap victim or the Devil himself? I'm hardly the first critic to spot the similarity to 'The Howling Man' episode of the original *Twilight Zone*, and it's true that this feels like a stretched-out 30 minute story at times; it's a super slow burn, and you'll lose count of the slow-zoom shots on the red lit-basement door, flanked with bolts and a hefty wooden crucifix. Yet there's



Sketchy brother Steve insists he's trapped Satan in the basement

an undeniable chill to the voice behind the door, and the film maintains a nice level of tension throughout its running time. The final image gave me a satisfying shiver, too.

Another way of doing something new with horror is to take two previous properties and mash them together. *Here Comes Hell* does precisely that by blending *Downton Abbey* with *The Evil Dead*. The



efforts to evoke a 1930s feel are capital, darling, from the opening 'Ladies and Gentleman' monologue, to the hokey 'fake' model and car effects; little things like this gives the film a pleasing nightmare edge. Once the demons finally break out (it takes a while) there's gory fun to be had, even in black and white. My wife walked in mid-watch and guffawed at some of the acting: "This looks like a sixth form drama project!" she said. Harsh, but I know what she means. Yet there's an earnest spirit here, plus an excellent string quartet soundtrack that elevates the film. Oh, and the 'worms-in-the-eye-sockets' bit almost made me puke, so bravo for that.

Finally, we have the most accomplished of the three, with *Come To Daddy*. Elijah Wood (below) is achingly sympathetic as a troubled young man visiting his estranged dad after decades of abandonment. The reunion, at the father's bizarre seaside home, doesn't go quite as planned. The film subverts genre labels by simply evading them; it's way too slippery to pin down. Is it a family drama, a thriller, a supernatural horror or a laugh-out-loud comedy? Actually, it's all of these things at the same time. Just watch the father and son discussion about Elton John for proof. It's simultaneously funny, tense, depressing and scary. And if there were ever an Oscar for the best Michael Heseltine joke in a motion picture, this one would be a shoo-in.

For me, there will always be a place for generic, predictable story patterns in movies. Millions of us derive a strange sense of comfort from the recognisable rhythms of truly 'generic' films. It's why they're so popular. It just makes it all the more fun when something comes along that has the courage to take a different, and often far quirkier, turn.

are trapped on ski lifts or in saunas. The people in this case are a gaggle of (remarkably healthy-looking) kids who have just been liberated from a Nazi death camp in Poland in the dying days of the war. The peril they're in is that the remote country house they have been liberated to is surrounded by ravenously hungry dogs roaming free now their Nazi masters have fled. To compound the problem, there's no food, water or electricity, so the poor kids are equally ravenous.

The two eldest are Hanys (Nicolas Przygoda) and Hanka (Sonia Mietielica) who as well as being the strongest also share a mutual attraction. This upsets the awkward Wladek (Kamil Polnisiak) who covets her for himself, and he finds himself torn between helping his friends and trying to engineer a fatal accident for his love rival.

Plenty going on, then, and one could not fairly describe *Werewolf* as dull, but somehow it never truly engages. Firstly, just like those aforementioned films where people are stuck in an ATM vestibule with a serial killer over a Bank Holiday weekend, the premise is over-engineered to the point of absurdity. Second, as a result, it is wholly unconvincing: not only are there a couple of plot twists that defy belief but the kids look as if they have wandered in from the set of *Outnumbered*, so sparky and energetic are they; these kids are supposed to have come direct from a death camp. Which brings me to my third and deepest objection.

Werewolf is at heart an exploitation movie. Nothing wrong with that: so is *Jaws*; but I had hoped the days of exploiting the Holocaust to provide the backdrop for run-of-the-mill thrillers were over. Trivialising the demonisation and systematic persecution of a vulnerable minority group merely to provide fodder for entertainment is surely no longer welcome or acceptable; even the notoriously tasteless Italian B-movie industry stopped making Nazi flicks in the 1980s. Granted, there are still plenty of horror films that use Nazis as evil incarnate, but that's not the case here: the dogs are the main threat, the biggest genocide in human history merely window dressing.

There is, it has to be said, much



to admire about *Werewolf*. The locations are stunning and they are beautifully captured in some elegant photography. Director Adrian Panek has wrung two or three decent performances from his young cast in what must have been rather testing circumstances. It's gruesome enough without being over the top, and it has the good sense to last less than 90 minutes. But it has serious flaws too and a yawning chasm where its heart should be.

Daniel King



Crawl

Dir Alexandre Aja, US/France/
Serbia 2019
On UK release

Monsters of all types, sizes and origins continue to haunt cinema screens on a regular basis, but big screen releases for the monster movie subgenre concerning apex predators are few and far between, and when they do get theatrical distribution, they are usually panned mercilessly.

In such a climate, there is a steady stream of such films released directly for home viewing, all of which seem to be competing for the title of most ludicrously far-fetched entry; in particular, the preposterous yet entertaining *Sharknado* films have quite literally jumped the shark in their quest to be as ridiculous as humanly possible, and their tongue-in-cheek approach has proved surprisingly successful.

While sharks are undoubtedly at the top of the food chain in terms of the number of horror films made about them, plenty of other apex predators exist. However, the often questionable offerings featuring such beasts remain somewhat of a rarity; horror movies about alligators are no exception, but now *Crawl* aspires to bring them to the surface of mainstream entertainment.

As easy as it would undoubtedly be to imitate the *Sharknado* formula of unhinged ridiculousness, *Crawl* instead gravitates more towards the ur-text of the genre, namely *Jaws*. By telling a tense, ruthless tale of a father and daughter trapped in a crawlspace that is not only full of alligators but also steadily flooding as a hurricane

approaches, the filmmakers have managed to create a grimly entertaining story that's just realistic enough to keep you invested in the characters and their fate.

Directed by Alejandra Aja, *Crawl* brings to mind the 2016 hit *Don't Breathe* (which is undoubtedly due to the film's sharing some of the same creative minds behind the scenes). Not only are there narrative parallels, with both films having protagonists trapped in small spaces while dangerous creatures pose a lurking threat, the sound design also plays an integral part in each.

As a result, every crunch and thrash is not only heard but also felt, and the appeal of the film is simply that you will enjoy a succession of good jump scares. As the tension builds, the scares keep coming and the prospects of the protagonists' survival become increasingly dire, the film succeeds on a primal level that may have you pulling your feet up, just in case a stray alligator has found its way into your local picture house.

The gore is also leagues ahead of that seen in most apex predator films. Deliberately seeking to gross you out as much as possible without going overboard and becoming involuntarily funny – just as the sound design creates an unpleasant, yet amusing experience – the gore will delight those who can stomach it.

Narratively, the film treads water with a rather basic plot line and acting that is decidedly wooden. However, considering one hardly watches movies about marauding monsters for the quality of the writing or acting, this is easily forgiven, and neither Kaya Scodelario or Barry Pepper are by any means deserving of a Razzie Award (even if Pepper has previously had the dubious honour of winning one).

While *Crawl* doesn't possess the depth of the iconic *Jaws*, it is far better than most films of its ilk. Boasting a significantly higher production quality and a more talented crew than the vast majority of these films, *Crawl* is ultimately a fresh, if forgettable, affair with plenty of bite and a hilarious use of a certain classic tune by Bill Haley & His Comets.

Leyla Mikkelsen



BLU-RAY AND DVD

MEGA TIME SQUAD

Arrow Video, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

Likeable drug dealer John tries to give himself a better life by nicking a load of cash from Triad gangsters and ends up with a bracelet that allows him to travel through time, creating multiple versions of himself as he does so. These selves team up as the titular squad – but can they trust themselves? This is a pacy, fun time travel caper which doesn't bother much with the temporal mechanics, focusing instead on the split selves and their slapdash attempts to steal their way to a carefree future. Anton Tennet is great in the lead, and Jonny Brugh is a hoot as his former boss turned nemesis. It doesn't bring much new to the table, but it's diverting enough for a lazy afternoon watch. **Martin Parsons** ★★☆☆☆

ANNA AND THE APOCALYPSE

Vertigo Releasing, £14.99 (DVD)

It cannot be denied: *Anna and the Apocalypse* is a bit of a hard sell. A Scottish high school romcom runs headlong into a zombie horror comedy, and it's a musical. Impressively, though, director John McPhail manages to make the whole thing cohere admirably. The zombie stuff is nothing *Shaun of the Dead* didn't do first and the tone is slightly too uneven for the emotional beats to work, yet it manages to feel organic in a way that is quite extraordinary. It's helped by the likeable young leads and sterling support from Mark Benton and Paul Kaye (each in roles they could pull off in their sleep, yet played with gusto); but where the film really stands out is in its musical numbers, composed by Roddy Hart and Tommy Reilly. A mixture of immediate earworms and charming slow-burners, the soundtrack is a joy and feels like a gift-wrapped cult hit. Picking a standout song is almost impossible, but toe-tapping showtunes "Hollywood Ending" and "Break Away" are just pipped for me by the snarling anthem "Soldier at War," sung with vicious glee by Ben Wiggins. **MP** ★★★★★

US

Universal Pictures, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £7.99 (DVD)

I was one of the few people who found Jordan Peele's directorial debut, and surprise hit, *Get Out* underwhelming – more of an overextended *Twilight Zone* episode than a thought-provoking horror revelation – so I was happily surprised by his follow-up, *Us*, which is everything its predecessor was claimed to be: smart, visceral, scary and often darkly funny. It's another tale that explores notions of identity and privilege, the self and its other, through a genre lens, but here Peele pulls off a multi-layered, metaphor-rich and allusive film that does for doppelgängers what Romero did for zombies. This time around, the writer/director is also blessed with a superb cast (playing two versions of themselves) led by an incandescently good Lupita Nyong'o. Highly recommended. **DS** ★★★★★

FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR

Second Sight, £22.99 (Limited Edition Blu-ray)

A 12-year-old boy gets abducted by aliens, but since this is a 1980s movie, non-consensual child-snatching was deemed not just acceptable but enjoyable: the kid ends up on a fun adventure, after all, flying around in a giant shiny walnut. Nostalgia renders films like this critic-proof, but I never saw it the first time round. My fresh take? Hmm. The second half never quite lives up to the mysterious first, and for a film about the vast possibilities of space, it winds up feeling oddly claustrophobic. The effects are mostly impressive though, and Second Sight have delivered a lovely HD print. **PL** ★★☆☆☆

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Downing Nazi rockets

In 'Beam me Up' [FT381:29-30], Jenny Randles states that the Gloster Meteor was the only Allied aircraft able to catch and stop Nazi V rockets. In fact, the V1 the Allied aircraft were intercepting was powered by an Argus Pulsejet and not a rocket engine; only the V2 was powered by a rocket engine, and this weapon could not be intercepted because of its trajectory and very high speed in its terminal dive. And at least five other allied aircraft besides the Gloster Meteor were used to intercept V1s – the Hawker Tempest, De Havilland Mosquito, Supermarine Spitfire, Naval Fairey Firefly as well as RAF Mustangs. These aircraft accounted for many more V1s than the Gloster Meteor, which was only credited with 13 shoot-downs.

Carol Scott

South Shields, Tyne & Wear

Voynich Manuscript

Following the publication of my peer-reviewed paper 'The Language and Writing System of MS408 (Voynich) Explained', in the journal *Romance Studies* [FT381:4], scholars have requested a method paper of instruction in order to participate in translating the manuscript. This is now available to download free from the LingBuzz website, titled 'The Algorithmic Method for Translating MS408 (Voynich)': <<https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004653>>

Dr Gerard Cheshire

Research Associate, University of Bristol

SIMULACRA CORNER



This is a picture of the recently rediscovered Hawaiian plant, *Hibiscadelphus woodii*. Robert Schneck noticed that it resembles a sniper.

Cool advice

A group of us were sent on a basic food hygiene course in the mid 1990s where we were told that hot food should always be put straight in the fridge so that it would be cooled down as quickly as possible. Most of us checked the instructions for our fridges when we got home. Every fridge manufacturer was quite clear, you should *never* put hot food in the fridge. When I read Mythconceptions on the subject [FT382:27], I checked the instructions for my current fridge purchased three years ago. Again they were clear: never put warm food in the fridge. So if you are a food hygienist you put your hot food in a fridge as

quickly as possible; if you are a fridge maker you never put warm/hot food in a fridge; everyone else toss a coin?

Robert Flood

Penkridge, Stafford

By degrees

David Hambling makes a minor slip in his item on heat bursts [FT381:14]. The highest tempera-

ture now accepted by the World Meteorological Organisation is 56.7°C (134°F) as he says, but it was recorded at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley, California. The figure recorded at El Aziziyah, Libya, was 57.8°C (136°F), but this figure was struck from the records in 2012. Both the Aziziyah and Furnace Creek Ranch records date from the early 20th century. The highest undisputed (i.e. recent) temperatures recorded are around 54°C (129.2°F) at various places around the world, including Death Valley, Mitribah, Kuwait and Turbat, Pakistan.

Richard Cameron

Ruislip, west London

Thirteen at table

You can glean a surprising amount of fortean material from the *Spectator*. I found this in the issue of 10 November 2018 (p.69): "In 1890s Paris, spare young men sat around in evening dress waiting to be summoned should someone drop out of dinner leaving the host with 13. They were called 'quatorzièmes'."

The superstition regarding sitting 13 to a table possibly differs in detail from place to place. As I have heard it in Norway, the outcome is that one of the party

will die before the end of the year. (There has to be a time limit, of course, since everyone dies eventually.) Now, this superstition can be laid to rest once and for all. I've been seated 13 to a meal no less than three times, and nobody died within the stipulated time frame. The first time was many years ago, in the home of one of my university professors. The second and third times were rather more interesting, since they happened in connection with my mother's 80th birthday some 10 years ago. As you'd expect, most of the participants were in their 70s and 80s, and the statistical probability that one of them would die within the year must have been considerable. Yet nobody did. So you needn't be afraid next time you find yourself eating in the company of 12 others. Apologies to any quatorzièmes out there being robbed of their livelihood, though.

Nils Erik Grande

Oslo, Norway

Mobile eels

Richard Muirhead and the *Illustrated London News* are/were apparently unaware that eels regularly travel overland, both in times of drought to find new water sources, and also in times of wet weather for... well, let's just say for their own reasons. The fact the caption goes so far as to state that it was "the largest ever found in the forest" might have been a bit of a hint [FT381:71].

Thanks for providing me with food for thought for so many years.

Stuart Jenkins

By email

Inevitable screw-up

Nils Erik Grande [FT382:73] has missed the most obvious argument against the world that we experience being a computer simulation: the sheer improbability that it would succeed in running for decades without a breakdown or a glitch revealing it for what it is. All technology goes wrong sooner or later (forget Occam's razor, just apply Murphy's law).

Martin Jenkins

London





Birmingham light

My son took this photo during his paper round at 8.20am on 17 February 2019. He said the illuminated object approached from the north-east. Because we live beneath the flight path for Birmingham International airport, we have ample opportunity to compare aircraft

velocity and altitude. He said this object didn't look familiar, and its speed was far quicker than a commercial aircraft on final approach, and too slow to be a shooting star. There was no sonic boom or any other noise indicating either propeller or jet-powered aircraft, and no contrail to suggest it was travelling at high altitude. It had

an elongated elliptical shape, with the longer axis pointing downward from north to south – though the photo shows it as a glowing ball without any discernable features.

Over the last 15 years there have been a number of sightings in the area pertaining to the supposed 'black triangle' or TR-3B/A Astra/Manta craft, but this object bore no resemblance to either of these (alleged) aircraft in either shape or performance. One comparison he did make, though, was with the fighter-jets we watched every day while holidaying close to the estuary near Carmarthen in Wales. He said that "none of them would have caught the object if they were forced to pursue it"; though this was just an opinion based on watching jets engaged in mock-combat sorties and travelling at subsonic speed. We'd be very interested to know whether anybody can corroborate the sighting, or offer an explanation.

Simon Deeming
By email

like folklore, history, linguistics, and others. It is too narrow to think that only zoologists can produce scholarship in cryptozoology.

Dr Shuker authoritatively disagrees with me regarding the definition of cryptozoology, yet I found many and various versions of a definition across references. He did not supply an operational definition that was different from "zoology". Finally, though Dr Shuker's view of the field is grounded and scientific, mainstream cryptozoology, notably in the US, is heavily laden with fictional/fantasy creatures, paranormal, and even supernatural ideas. It seems difficult to embrace a "true" cryptozoology when amateurs dominate the research and produce mass media content, not peer-reviewed studies. What is the cryptozoological canon? And who decides that?

Considering how the field has changed and popularised since Heuvelmans, Sanderson, and the ISC conceived of it, cryptozoology long escaped the domain of zoology (but maybe was never really there) – and now runs wild and free.

Sharon A Hill
Harrisburg Pennsylvania

Pain pathways

Regarding MythConception #238 about anaesthesia [FT381:25]: there have been numerous studies of pain in redheads which show that some have a secondary pain pathway. This means that the conventional anaesthetic may not be effective for them, so I suppose you could say they needed extra anaesthetic. Women also can have an extra pathway, so perhaps anaesthetics should always be tested on female redheads before being recommended for general use.

Incidentally, a recent BBC World Service episode of *Inside Health* featured a pain specialist who stated that Paracetamol's effect is 80 per cent placebo, which might explain why as a female with a tendency to redheadedness (well, advanced freckles!) I get no relief from it.

Georgina Skipper
Wyke Regis, Dorset

Cæsar's Column

I was struck by a line in Noel Rooney's review of *Conspiracies of Conspiracies* [FT381:60] where he writes: "And who knew that the great Ignatius Donnelly had penned a conspiracist novel (*Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century*)?"

"Well, I knew," I thought. Because within arm's reach was my well-worn copy of *Eccentric Lives, Peculiar Notions* by FT favourite John Michell. In the chapter "Congressman Donnelly, the great heretic", Michell spells out the plot of Donnelly's 1890 novel, in which businessmen rule the world in cities of wondrous splendour, all supported by slave labour. There is eventually a bloody uprising and the bodies of the businessmen are "cemented into a huge pillar to commemorate the revolution". Not that this really solves anything, as the moment the last body is sealed

into the column, the mob turns on its leaders and what is left of civilisation collapses, while the narrator, who has escaped by airship, flies to "a quiet part of Uganda"(!) in order to build the ideal society of the future.

Christopher DiGrazia
Bradford, Massachusetts

Defining cryptozoology

I wish to thank Dr Shuker for responding to my letter [FT379:74] about the finding of *Siren reticulata* as non-cryptozoological [FT381:72]. He reiterated and clarified his view that cryptozoology is part of zoology, a scientific endeavour. The finding and naming of a new animal is zoology, whether or not we agree that the animal was a "cryptid", but I continue to hold the position that "cryptozoology" is far more broad – interdisciplinary, including essential, non-scientific fields

King Kong and the Spicers

In his account of Darren Naish's *Hunting Monsters* [FT382:57], the Hierophant's Apprentice writes: "Following the unsung hero of Loch Ness research, Adrian Shine, Naish makes an interesting connection between an amphibious sauropod dinosaur featured in the movie *King Kong* and the Spicers' description of what they saw in 1933."

As far as I know, I was the first person to point out this connection, in *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (1983). When it was published, this pioneering work of scepticism by a disillusioned monster-hunter received a sulky review from Adrian Shine, who dismissed it as "a little premature", while my focus on the *King Kong* connection was described as "too silly even to laugh at" by that other Nessie expert, Henry H Bauer. Anyone interested in



learning more about such matters should consult my new book, *Decline and Fall of the Loch Ness Monster* (Zoilus Press, 2019).

If I had to nominate an unsung hero in this field it would be Peter Baker, whose work at the loch in the 1960s first led to the recognition that the gigantic Nessies of 1933 and 1934 were boat wakes and whose research with echo sounders indicated both the absence of any evidence of monsters and the care required in interpreting results obtained using such methods.

Ronald Binns
Reydon, Suffolk

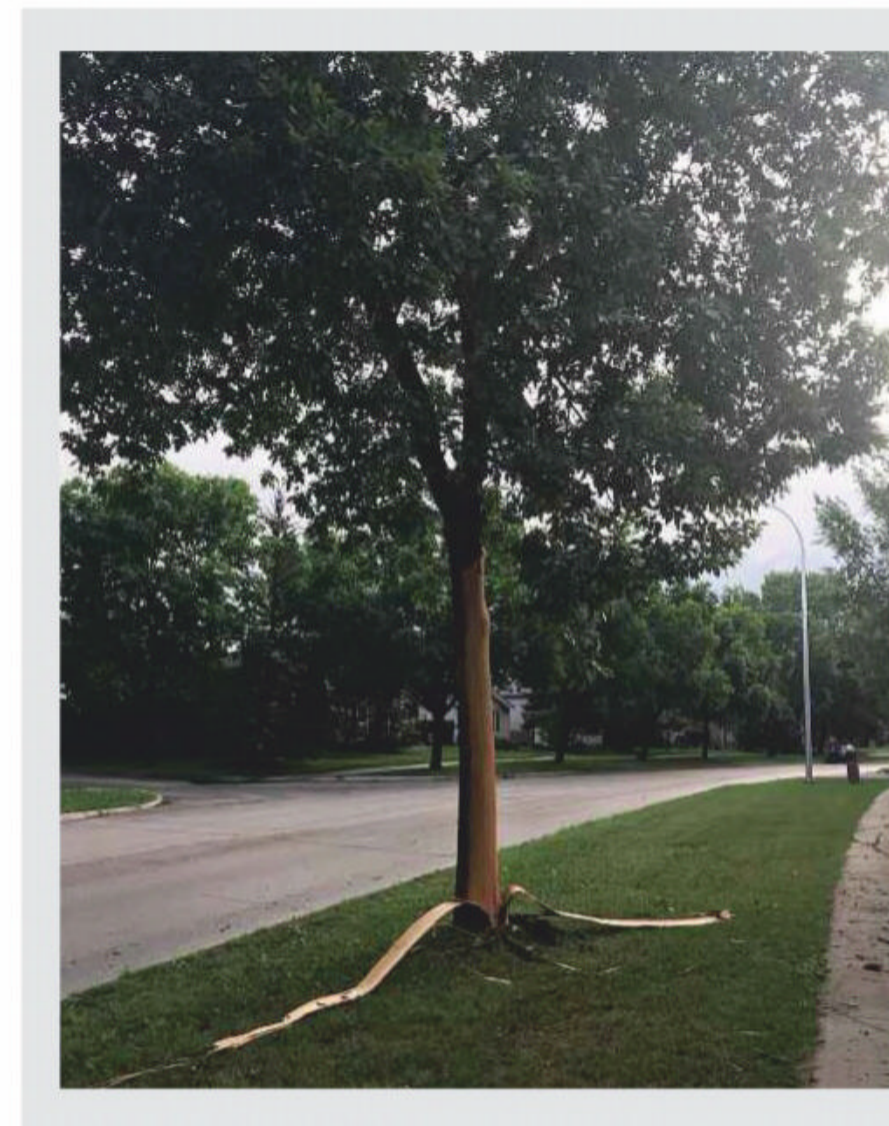
Nacrous clouds

An interesting article regarding earthquake lights ('Shake, rattle and glow' FT382:44-49), but I'm afraid that the security camera picture from Mexico City just looks like clouds lit by lightning in the distance or light pollution. A very slim chance so far south it could be noccullient or nacrous clouds – these rare and very high clouds are generally only seen over about 50 degrees north/south for noccullient clouds aka polar mesospheric clouds and I have seen these myself a few times and 75 degrees north/south for nacrous clouds aka polar stratospheric clouds. Sadly I've never seen nacrous clouds... yet!

Kevan Hubbard
Oxford

Striking correspondences

Prior to going on holiday to Tenerife recently, I was in telephone conversation with David Sutton about my article 'A Miscellany of Merseyside Mysteries'. As you do, we compared holiday plans, and he was heading off to Boulder, Colorado, in the USA to see Dead & Company, a current incarnation of The Grateful Dead. I tend to stockpile fortean-related books and then take some on holiday with me, and therefore I took Paul Pearsall's *The Heart's Code* (which is largely about cellular memory) and John Keel's *Our Haunted Planet* (one of the few Keel books that I had



Stripped bare

I came upon this tree after a very loud lightning storm in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on 4 July 2018. The lightning strike peeled the tree like a banana, but with little singeing. Some clods of earth were thrown out about three metres from the base of the tree.

Chris Rutkowski
By email



not read). I started my holiday read with *The Heart's Code* only to find, on page 51, reference to The Grateful Dead's fortean experiment where at their 1971 concerts in Port Chester, New York, they wanted to see if the audience could convey images of slides projected on a screen to a person miles away at Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn [see FT180:52]. Before my chat with David I had seen no reference to the Grateful Dead for years!

I probably started reading *Our Haunted Planet* after the Cricket World Cup Final on 14 July and was still reading it when I got home (I'm a slow reader). I finished it on the following Saturday morning over a mug of tea, when I read the final paragraph of the book:

"But even then we will have left our imprint behind. Thousands of years from now real visitors from some distant star may enter our solar system. They may stand upon our barren moon and look down at the burnt-out cinder that was once Earth, and they may find a metal plate among the craters. It will puzzle

their scientists because obviously the moon is uninhabitable and has never been settled. The plate will be just another erratic for their museum. They'll forget about it and never try to decipher the cryptic lettering. The lettering that states, 'We came in peace for all mankind'."

Of course, I recognised the reference to the stainless steel commemorative lunar plaques left on the Moon by the USA astronauts. It was then that it struck me that the date was 20 July – the 50th anniversary of the first Moon landing. Yet another fortean synchronicity in my life!

I should add that in the penultimate chapter of *Our Haunted Planet*, which I also read on the Saturday, there is the statement: "During the week of January 21, 1968, both a French and Israeli submarine disappeared without a trace in the placid Mediterranean." The French submarine was the *Minerve*. So it was also coincidental that two days later, on 22 July, there was the announcement that the *Minerve* had been found.

Maybe Keel's ultraterrestrial tricksters are playing their games?

Rob Gandy
By email

Further folk horror

I much enjoyed Gail-Nina Anderson's article 'The Old Ways' [FT381:36-43], but was surprised to see that, although she discusses David Rudkin's television play *Penda's Fen*, she overlooks his powerful stage play *Afore Night Come*, written, I believe, in the late 1950s. This "brooding study of the primitive forces latent in a rustic community is set among Worcestershire fruit-pickers and culminates in the ritual murder of an Irish tramp whom they suspect of destroying their virility". It is made clear that similar killings have been carried out in the recent past, perhaps annually. At the climax, the tramp is stabbed, or has his throat cut, by three of the fruit-pickers, using knives normally employed in cutting up worn-out tyres, specially sharpened (in an ominous earlier scene). A pitchfork is driven

LETTERS

into the adjacent ground and its handle bent backwards across the dead or dying tramp's throat, while a cross is cut into his chest. When the curtain falls, not long afterwards, "moonlight" illuminates the pitchfork, which has been left standing in isolation, the body of the tramp having been disposed of offstage, in unclarified circumstances.

The point, of course, is that the details of the murder are taken from the genuine killing in 1945 of Charles Walton in Lower Quinton, Warwickshire – like Worcestershire, a county of Rudkin's Mercia. Anderson briefly describes the case in the course of her article, and Cathi Unsworth discusses it in detail in 'Bloody Valentine' [FT381:44-51].

Afore Night Come is well crafted and, although demanding of its director, can be realised on stage without too much difficulty. As far as I know, it was Rudkin's first major success, the work that established his standing as a playwright. It is no longer frequently performed, not least, perhaps, because the sort of rural community in which it is set has largely disappeared, so that it has lost much of its resonance. But it should certainly be included in any survey of Folk Horror as defined by Anderson, because there nevertheless remains for many today a susceptibility, in her words, "to just the kind of mood and atmosphere that lie at its core".

MAK Duggan

Camberwell, London

I enjoyed Gail-Nina Anderson's article on folk horror. Towards the end she mentions the relative rarity of American folk horror movies. In this regard I'd suggest *The Witch* (2015). It is an American and Canadian co-production and the writer and director, Robert Eggers, is an American, so it probably qualifies. Eggers has said that during his childhood in New Hampshire he was fascinated by tales of witches and the early English settlers in the New World.

The Witch is set in New England during the 1630s and so is roughly contemporary with



Universe closed

This photograph was given me by parishioner Kara Crotta a few years ago. It was taken in the area of Rio Rancho, New Mexico, a city adjacent to Albuquerque, and kind of typifies New Mexico as the "Land of Enchantment". As General Lew Wallace, Territorial Governor of New Mexico (1878-1881), put it: "All calculations based on our experiences elsewhere fail in New Mexico."

The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Witchfinder General and *A Field in England*. The plot centres on a family – headed by the devout patriarch William – lately arrived from England, seeking a more godly life. Indeed, William is too godly even for the Puritan pilgrims amongst whom they have settled and the family is expelled for being disputatious and disruptive. They build an isolated homestead in the unspoiled forest and begin cultivating crops.

Soon strange, unsettling things begin to happen. The youngest child, still a baby, disappears. The crops fail. Misfortune follows misfortune. Initially these events are blamed on witches hiding in the forest, but soon suspicion turns inwards upon family members. Throughout it remains unclear whether the malign fortunes behind the family's misfortunes are real or the product of isolation and imagination soaked in Puritan imagery.

The film's dialogue is in 17th century English, spoken with a Yorkshire accent, which apparently some American audiences found a challenge. I had no difficulty with it, but I'm English and from the West Midlands. Some commentators felt that the film was let down by its ending, but I enjoyed it and would certainly recommend it.

Clive Davenhall

Stone, Staffordshire

I greatly enjoyed your special issue on Folk Horror. Like all such contributions, though, it seemed to miss one item that I regard as a pioneering contribution to the genre, although it never gets cited as such. You duly note the sensational Charles Walton murder story of 1945. The Walton story received something like canonical form on television in 1961 in an episode of Boris Karloff's wonderful Thriller series, entitled *Hayfork and Billhook*. This depicts something very close to

the Walton case, with a Fabian-style detective investigating dark doings in a backward English village – I mean, really backward. This is a ludicrous parody of contemporary rural England where witchcraft beliefs run riot, witches are commonly murdered, and everyone knows about the dark sacrificial rituals that proceed unchecked in the ancient stone circle. The script was by a popular English actor and television writer of the day called Alan Caillou, who allegedly took his name from his wartime *nom de guerre* in British special forces. (Note the allegedly).

If you suspend critical judgment, *Hayfork and Billhook* is actually great watching, with one disastrous exception. At points in the story, the heroine must see and be horrified by the spectral black dog that featured so centrally in the Walton myth, but the actual beast cast in the role may be the least frightening mutt ever put on screen. On the positive side, the final struggle within the local stone circle is terrific. I watch the episode whenever I can, although it is definitely a guilty pleasure.

It is a genuine and pioneering example of the Folk Horror genre, although its American origins mean that it is virtually never listed in that canon. It was broadcast in the UK in the early 1960s, because I saw it then, although I don't know precisely how it might have influenced later works.

Prof Philip Jenkins

Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Ancient Images by Ramsey Campbell (1989) concerns the type of issues dealt with in the Folk Horror Revival article. The book is about a suppressed Karloff/Lugosi horror film (based in turn on a short supernatural story), which the heroine of the story, Sandy Allan, is trying to locate and find out about. "She finds herself threatened by an ancient force protecting secrets deeper than the suppression of a 50-year-old movie."

Gary Stocker

By email

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Nights in The Cloisters

In November 2018, I went for a job interview to be the Front Of House Manager at The Cloisters in Letchworth Garden City. It's the only interview I've ever had where I've been asked, "How are you with ghosts?"

The Cloisters opened on 28 January 1907 having been created by the Quaker Miss Annie Jane Lawrence as a Theosophical Meditation Centre and open-air school. The design of the building came to her in a dream and was realised by William Harrison Cowlshaw. It is a riot of towers and external spiral staircases and I have heard it described as 'Hogwarts Junior'. Four electric organs had once been installed in the entrance hall, and through a system of pipes and shutters the disembodied sound of organ music would waft around the building. Symbolism abounded in the details around the building – doves represented guilelessness, bats were about to start their dusk patrols, bees built up honeycomb (to provide food for the gods), and butterflies danced with natural joy.

Unfortunately, not all of that detail has survived. During World War II, the building was commandeered by the Army, which did not treat it kindly. When it was returned after six years, Miss Lawrence did not have sufficient money to repair it. Convinced that it was a building for the community, she offered it to the County Council for free, but was turned down. In 1948, after a chance remark, she was inspired to offer it to the local Masonic fraternity. They accepted and the first Lodge meeting took place in October 1951 after extensive renovations. Some parts of the building are still not safe to explore – the towers are not open except for repair and the basement floods occasionally.

This was the building that I started work in around two weeks after that first interview.



With Christmas looming and Masonic Lodges holding festive dinners almost every night, I didn't really have time to reflect on the idea of there being any ghostly activity. Some things percolated through – the Chef told the story of having had a metal ladle thrown at his head when there was no one else in the kitchens; the General Manager, who lives on the premises, was said to have encountered some things that he couldn't explain – but on the whole it was just work as usual.

Then one night in February 2019, I was working on the bar and it was very quiet. I had been in and out of the cellar during the evening, but I hadn't been anywhere near it for 10-15 minutes when I heard a great bang. I went into the cellar to find three bottles of beer smashed on the floor. In itself, this was unusual – the bottles were all arranged on a shelf in rows of three, but they were not close to the edge of the shelf, so there was no reason they would just topple off. More significantly, the front row was still there and the empty space left by the smashed bottles was the row behind them.

I told a friend about this later and she suggested that a rat could have run across the shelves, behind the second row of bottles and pushed them forward, causing the front row to fall. Except I have never seen any evidence of rodents in the building, and the bottles in question – Adnam's *Ghost Ship*, of

all things – were flanked either side by other loose bottles. Why would this brand be the only ones damaged? It was a weird thing, but I put it aside as it didn't really affect me.

In early April I was in the bar again, this time at the end of the night. It is not uncommon for me to be the last person in the building and on this occasion, I

had shut the bar and locked all the doors before settling down to cash up. As I was doing this, there was a sudden banging on the bar behind me. It was very clearly the sound of a glass being thumped onto the bar top several times. I turned around but there was no one there and no glass. But it had given me a definite shock and I felt my hair standing on end. The pint glasses stored underneath the bar were too closely packed to have made the noise, and besides were on webbed plastic matting that dulls sound. I can honestly say, that was the quickest I've ever cashed up.

Later in the week, I asked the General Manager, Peter Lucas, what his experiences had been. Peter said that he had taken the position at the Cloisters as a sceptic and he still thought that he was, but three incidents had perplexed him.

The first was late one night when he was locking up. As part of the routine, the Main Masonic Temple at the centre of the building is the first thing to be locked. It involves going to get a key, locking the doors, and then replacing the key, so its not something you can really forget that you've done, but on this occasion when Peter returned to the Temple, the doors were wide open once again. He re-locked them but he said that he had a strong feeling that something wanted him to finish his work and go. Nothing malevolent, he said, more impatient.

The second incident was one evening when he was in the kitchens and, while walking through from one part to another, he heard a young female voice very clearly say "Hello". Although he registered having heard it, and there was no one else around, he just thought that it was his imagination and carried on with his work. Then, the following morning, the cleaner came to him and said that she had heard a young girl say "Hello" to her in the exact same place. Peter hadn't said anything to anyone – in fact, he'd almost forgotten about it.

The last incident took place outside the building, as Peter was taking rubbish out to the bins. The door from the kitchen opens outwards and folds back against the wall and, on a windless day like this one, stays open. However, as Peter finished at the bins, he turned around to find the door shut, forcing him to walk all the way around the building to get in again. But he still had some more rubbish to throw away, so this time, as he approached the bins, he looked back – and saw the door slowly closing, despite their being no breeze. In a very Dad-like tone, he said "I can see you" and the door stopped! It stayed open as he took the rubbish out and he closed it on his return.

Peter also said that he had a friend who belonged to the Spiritualist Church and that he had felt 'a presence' in the building that he thought was several young children. To a certain extent, this goes along with the building having been a school, but the pictures I have seen from that period suggest that the students at that time were adults. Of course, there's nothing to say that any spirits in the building don't predate the structure itself.

As for myself, I still love the Cloisters as a piece of unique architecture and am happy to work there still, even with the odd weird happening.

John Brown
Letchworth Garden City,
Hertfordshire

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

BEARDS OF WISDOM HUNT EMERSON

IN ANTIQUITY,
A LONG BEARD WAS
ALWAYS THE MARK
OF A WISE MAN!



BUT NOT EVERY
WISE MAN COULD
GROW A LONG
BEARD... AND THERE
WERE MANY PEOPLE
WHO WANTED TO
APPEAR WISE BUT
WERE TOO
IMPATIENT TO WAIT
FOR BEARD
GROWTH!

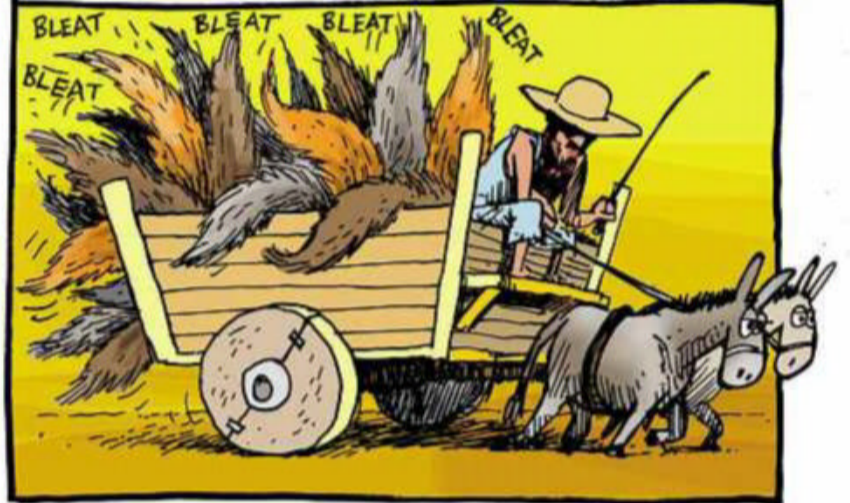
FOR THESE REASONS, THERE EXISTED IN
REMOTE MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS SECRET
BEARD FARMS...



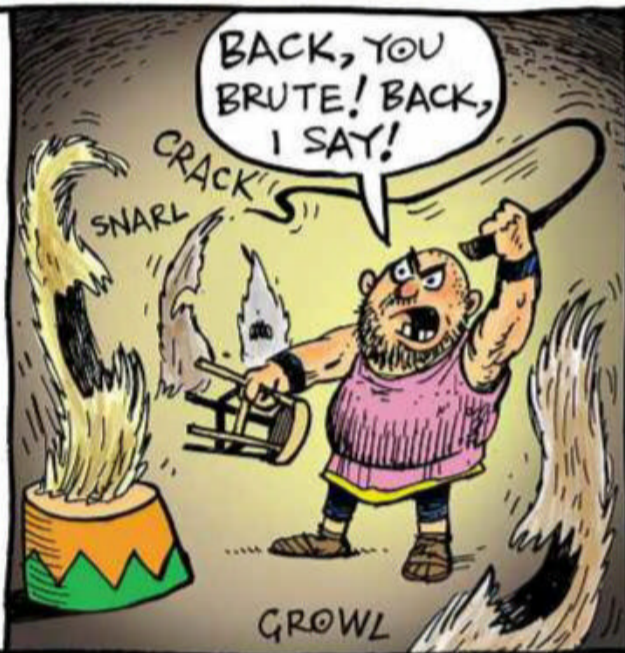
GROWN FROM
BEARD SEEDS
IN THE
STONY SOIL
THEY PREFER,
WHISKERS
WERE
NURTURED IN
SUPPORTING
FRAMES
UNTIL THEY
REACHED THE
LENGTH
REQUIRED...



THEN THEY WERE HARVESTED AND
TRANSPORTED TO THE VARIOUS
SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY...



THE NEW CROP
OF BEARDS,
WILD AND FRISKY,
WOULD BE
WRANGLLED BY
"THE BARBEMAN"
— A TOUGH
INDIVIDUAL
WHO TOOK NO
NONSENSE
FROM ANY
PESKY
WHISKERS!



WHEN THEY
WERE FULLY
TRAINED,
THE DAY
WOULD COME
WHEN THE
BEARDS WERE
INTRODUCED
TO THEIR NEW
OWNERS —
FECKLESS,
CALLOW YOUTHS
WITHOUT A
BRAIN BETWEEN
THEM...



...BUT
WHO, ON
RECEIVING
THEIR
BEARDS,
ATTAINED
WISDOM
AND
ENLIGHTEN-
MENT!



COMING NEXT MONTH



SEVENTIES SCARES

THE STRANGE POWER OF THE
USBORNE BOOK OF GHOSTS



TALES FROM THE CRYPT
SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF THE
CHASE VAULT MOVING COFFINS



THE GUYRA GHOST,
BANGS ON THE HEAD,
MEDIÆVAL CRIME ,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 385

ON SALE 10 OCT 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

On 21 May, Paul Nyamhanza, from Harare, Zimbabwe, went fishing with his brother Jeremiah, 19, at a farm in the village of Beatrice. As the pair cast their nets, a crocodile snatched Jeremiah in its jaws. His brother was uninjured and reported the incident to Zimparks rangers. When Jeremiah's body was recovered from the water, it was discovered his penis was missing and had presumably been bitten off. *infosurhoy.com*, 22 May 2019.

Fabrizio Stabile, 29, of New Jersey, visited a surf resort in Waco, Texas, on 8 September 2018. Six days later he developed a severe headache, and by the following morning he was unable to speak coherently or get out of bed. Doctors found *Naegleria fowleri*, commonly known as brain-eating amoeba, in his spinal fluid. The amoeba lurks in warm bodies of fresh water such as lakes and hot springs, makes its way to the brain via the nose, and causes an infection known as primary amoebic meningoencephalitis. Since the 1960s there have been up to eight cases per annum in the US, with five in 2016, none last year and no other cases reported this year. There have been nine cases in Texas since 2005. In 2013 an anti-parasitic drug called miltefosine (sold as Impavido) was credited with saving two victims, but by the time Stabile was diagnosed, it was too late to save him. The advice is to keep water out of your nose while swimming in warm or untreated fresh water, by either holding your nose, keeping it above water or using a nose clip. *[CNN]* 3 Oct 2018.

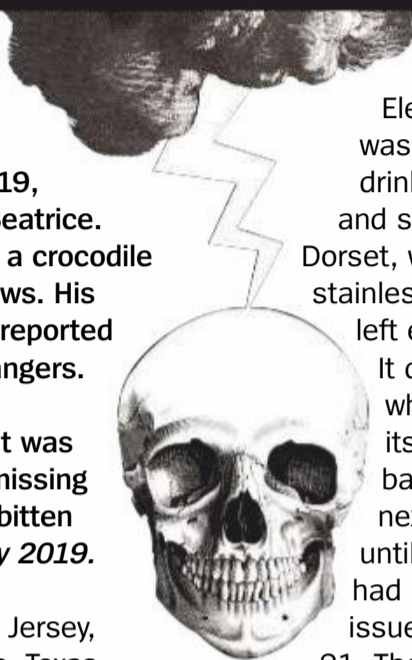
A case study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* last March concerned an 18-year-old in Faridabad, India, who suffered "grand mal" seizures. The diagnosis was neurocysticercosis, a parasitic disease of the brain caused by swallowing tapeworm eggs that have passed in the faeces of someone who has an intestinal tapeworm. The larvae crawl out of the eggs and into muscle and brain tissue, where they form cysts. Doctors also discovered cysts in the patient's right eye and right testis. It was too late for antiparasitic drugs, and the teenager died two weeks later. Cysticercosis infections mostly occur in rural areas of developing countries where pigs are allowed to roam and where sanitation practices are poor. One comfort is that patients cannot infect other people. *[CNN]* 28 Mar 2019.

On 22 November 2018, Elena Struthers-Gardner, 60, was carrying a Mason jar-style drinking glass with a screw top lid and straw in her kitchen in Poole, Dorset, when she fell. The 10in (25cm) stainless steel straw skewered her left eyeball and entered her brain. It damaged her brain stem, which controls breathing, with its tip coming to rest against the back of her skull. She died the next day. She had been a jockey until injury curtailed her career and had been suffering with mobility issues since a fall at the age of 21. The eco-friendly straws have increased in popularity to replace single-use plastic straws as part of the fight against plastic waste. At the inquest, the coroner said metal drinking straws should never be used with a lid that fixes them in place, and "great care should be taken" while using them. *metro.co.uk*, 8 July; *D.Telegraph*, 9 July 2019.

A woman cut the flesh off her sedated husband's arms and fed it to her dogs – then encouraged them to eat the rest of him. Svetlana Batukova, 49, originally from Russia, denied killing Horst Hans Henkels, 70, in Cala Millor, Majorca, in 2016, claiming the dogs attacked him. She faces up to 14 years in jail after being found guilty of murder. *Metro*, 26 June 2019.

David Dowell, 34, from Queensland was rushed to hospital and diagnosed with a severe case of salmonella on 3 December 2018, two days after he was dared to eat a gecko at a party. His urine turned black and he was vomiting green bile. His stomach became so bloated that he looked six months pregnant and fluid begun to fill his lungs and leak from his stomach. The father of three died in surgery on 11 December, after he "basically rotted from the inside out".

Friends reportedly saw him eat the gecko, though it is not known whether it definitely caused his death. (His sister said he never mentioned the gecko.) Mr Dowell's death is similar to that of Sam Ballard, a keen rugby player from Sydney who died last year. Mr Ballard ate a slug for a dare while partying with his friends back in 2010, aged 19. He fell into a coma and became paralysed after the incident, before dying in November 2018 **[FT378:80]**. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 July; *inews.co.uk*, *D.Mirror*, 3 July 2019.



Cosy Crime Pays For Indy Author

Lynn Florkiewicz's dream of being a writer began when she was just six years old, but it had to sit on the back-burner until, at the age of 45, she took a creative writing course with The Writers Bureau, and started out on a whole new adventure...



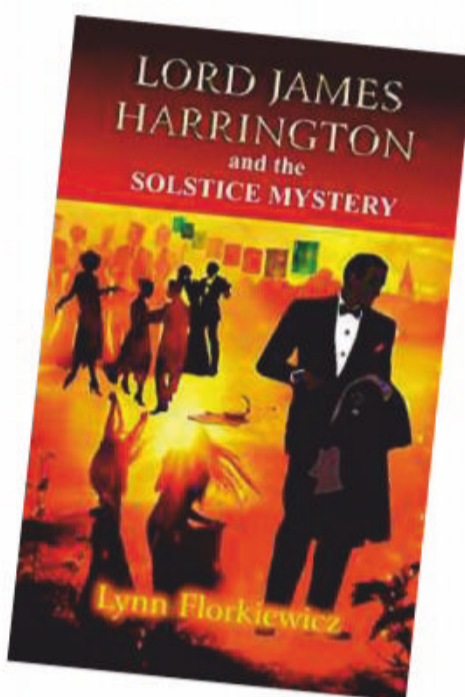
Lynn Florkiewicz

Avid reading as a child laid the foundation for Lynn's love of mystery and crime stories, and she always imagined that one day she'd write her own. When she grew up though, marriage and a promising career as a singer/songwriter on the British and American folk circuits gave her little time to pursue writing until, after a bout of particularly debilitating illness, she decided it was time to bring it to the fore.

Lynn enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course back in 2001. She worked steadily through its 20 tutor-marked assignments, earning her course fees back from published work and getting placed/highly commended in several writing competitions along the way. Confidence thoroughly boosted, she then decided to try writing a children's adventure story - *The Quest for the Crystal Skulls*, of which, BBC Springwatch's Michaela Strachen said: 'There are many ways to create awareness about what we're doing to planet Earth, I found this an incredibly powerful and compelling one. I read it in one go.' (*The Quest for the Crystal Skulls* is available from Amazon and Penpress Partnership Book Publishing).

Inspired by a long-time love of cosy crime (Agatha Christie, Carola Dunn etc), Lynn's next move was to follow her

childhood dream and create her own murder-mystery series. And so it was that Lord James Harrington, country landowner, ex-racing driver and amateur sleuth, was born. When her first whodunit, *The Winter Mystery*, was launched on Kindle it received a plethora of five-star reviews from cosy crime fans, and that was all the encouragement Lynn needed to write more.



Five years on, and Lord James Harrington is a well-established character with his name on nine book covers. Lynn is already in the process of writing a tenth, with plans to release a new mystery every year. The books are all available from Amazon in Kindle, print and audio format, as well

as from Lord Harrington's very own website: www.lordjamesharrington.com.

'I've created a world that I adore and I love to slip into that imaginary community and meet up with my characters,' says Lynn. 'I am not a literary writer. I'm not here to change the world or make you think, I want to entertain people and, from the feedback I've received, I tick that box.'

Recently, Lord James Harrington was picked-up by Magna Publishing (part of Ulverscroft). They intend to release the whole series in audio and large print formats, and already, the American Audio File Magazine has awarded the first of these recordings with an Earphone Audio Award.

Lynn is just one of many Writers Bureau students who have found their way to publishing success. So if you harbour a dream to write, they can help. Their courses provide students with a professional writer as a personal tutor and cover all types of writing, as well as teaching the business side of being an author. To request free details, contact The Writers Bureau at: www.writersbureau.com or call – 0800 856 2008. Quote ATT19

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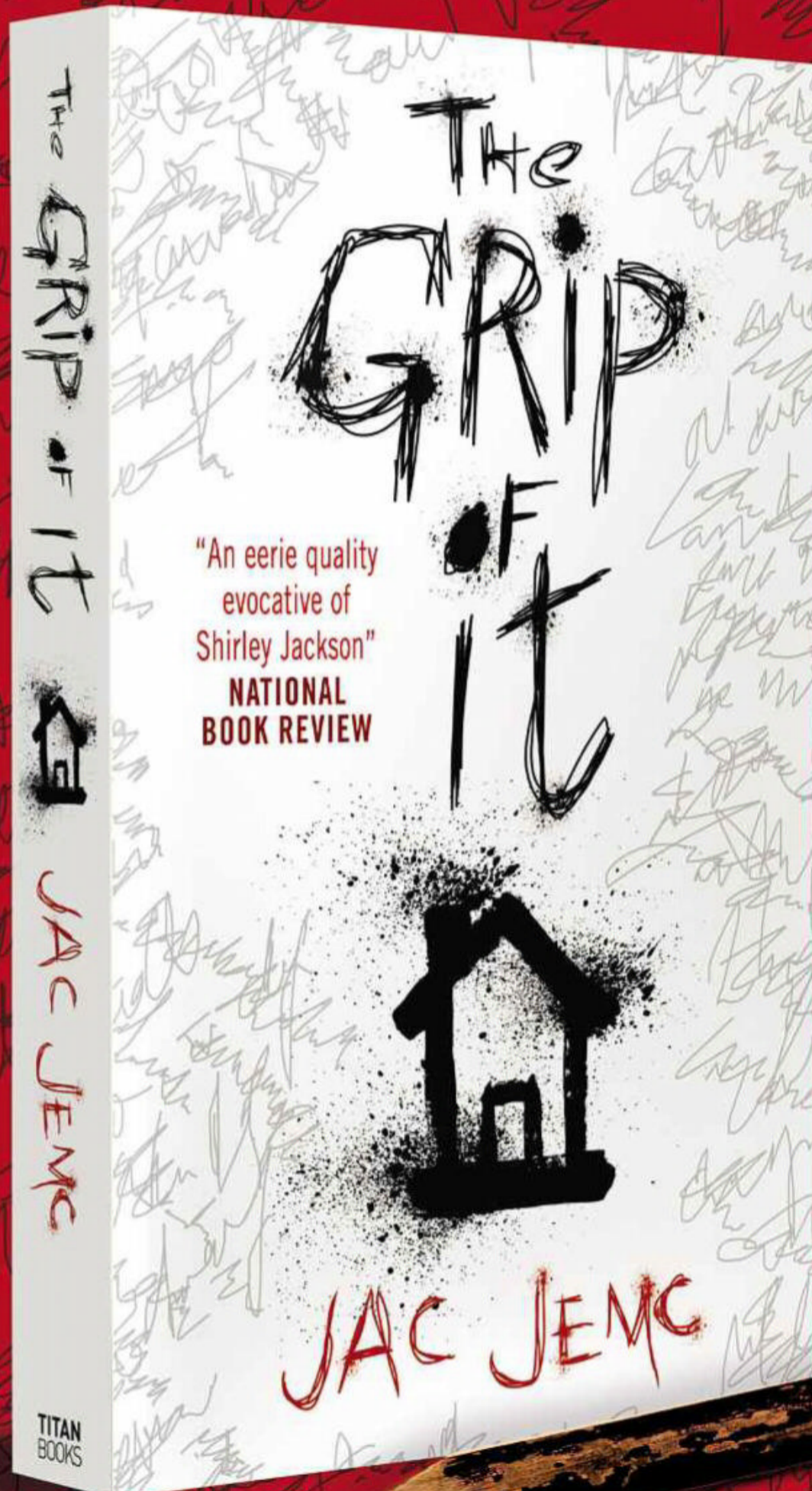
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